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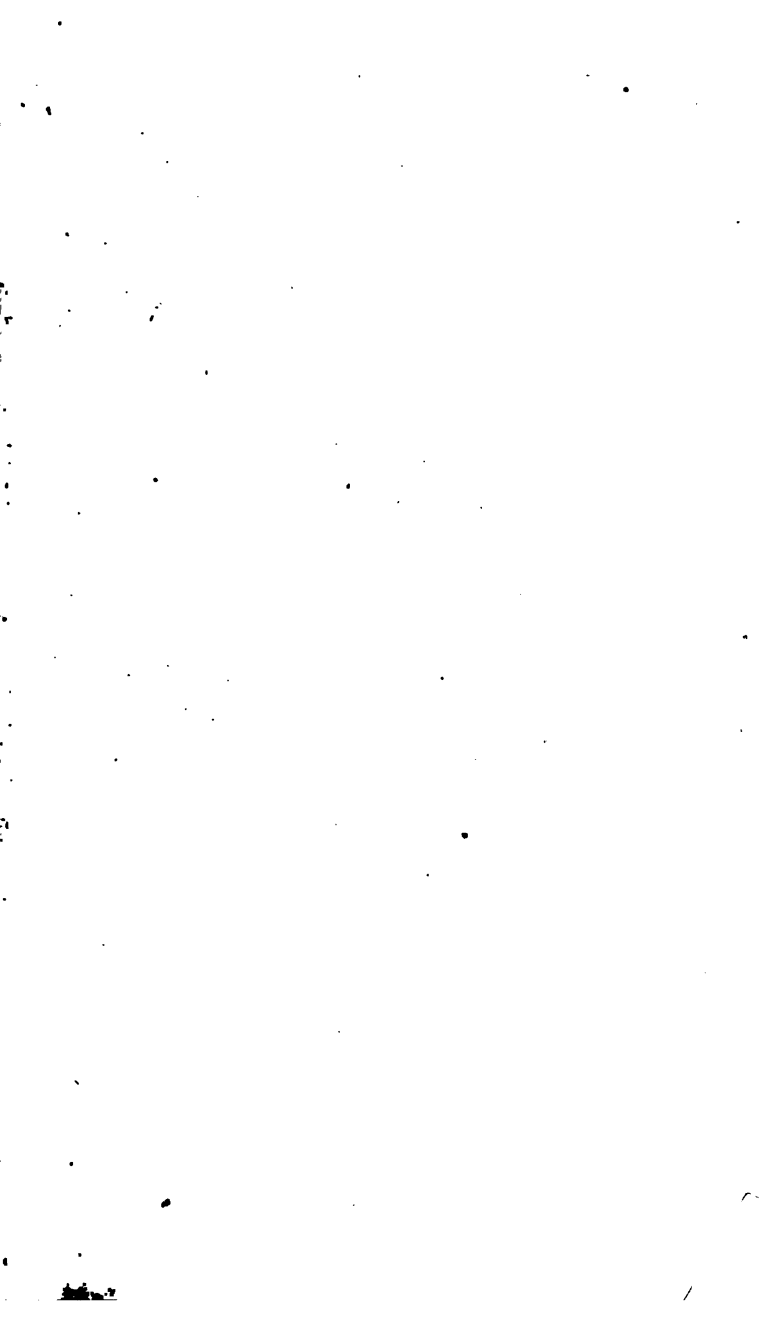
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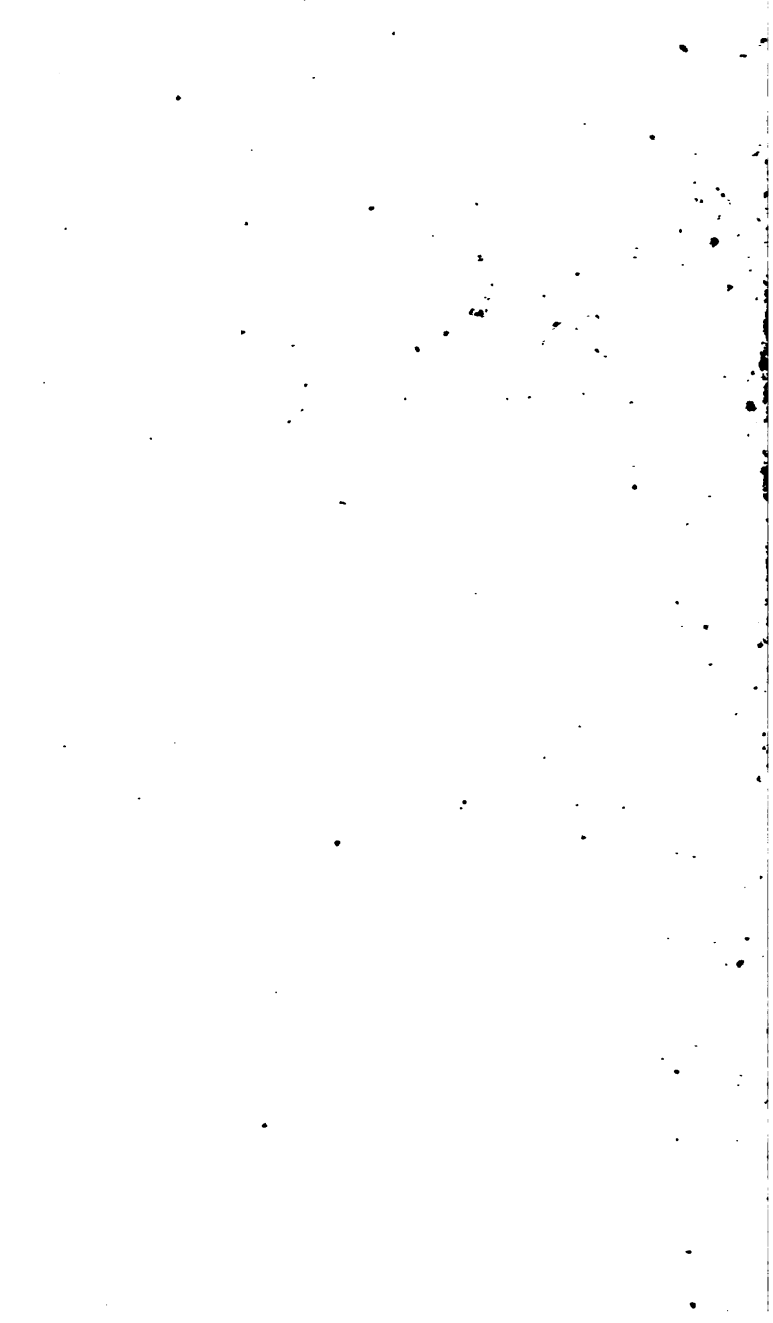
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IMPENETRABLE SECRET.

Printed by J. Darling, Leadenhall Street, London.

THE
IMPENETRABLE SECRET;
FIND IT OUT!

A NOVEL.

By FRANCIS LATHOM,

AUTHOR OF

PUZZLED AND PLEASED; VERY STRANGE BUT VERY TRUE; CASTLE OF OLLADA;
YOUNG JOHN BULL; ASTONISHMENT; UNKNOWN; FASHIONABLE MYSTERIES;
MYSTIC EVENTS; FATAL VOW; MIDNIGHT BELL; LIVE AND LEARN;
MYSTERIOUS FREEBOOTER; HUMAN BEINGS; POLISH BANDIT, &c. &c.

Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder?

SHAKESPEARE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

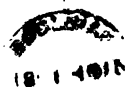
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THE
IMPENETRABLE SECRET.

CHAP. I.

THE contessa Della Piacca had already received from the major-domo Bernardo, an account of Sylvio's acquittal of the charge which had been brought against him.

The moment the conte Lorenzo entered the apartment where she was awaiting his return, she said—"Well, my dear conte, Bernardo has already found means of gaining me such intelligence as has satisfied my curiosity with regard to the sentence of our friend Sylvio; he is, I find, as I was certain he

must be, acquitted of the accusation preferred against him."

"Oh yes, entirely so," returned the conte.

"I knew it must be so," replied Averilla. "Bernardo," she added, "has shewn himself very much interested, to bring me all the intelligence he could collect, and therefore I am infinitely obliged to him; but I am sure, that except in the single instance of Sylvio's acquittal, his repetition of circumstances must have been erroneous. Did Sylvio give a narrative of his life in the court?"

"Yes, he did," answered Della Piacca. "Bernardo was perfectly right in telling you that."

"But he must have been mistaken in telling me what that narrative was composed of," replied Averilla; "pray, repeat it to me; I am very anxious to hear it correctly."

The conte began to recapitulate, directly, the account which Di Rosalva had given of himself to the court; and although he perceived that his contessa

endeavoured to restrain herself from speaking till she had heard him out, still frequently, as by an involuntary emotion, she exclaimed—"Impossible! how very strange! it cannot be!"

To these exclamations she confined herself, till the conte had concluded his account of their friend; she then said—"I know not that I ever felt so greatly astonished in my life, as I have done during the time that you have been speaking; I can scarcely believe that I have heard right. Did Sylvio say, that from his first recollection of himself till the time of his coming to Turin, about eight months ago, he had resided solely on the mountains of Tortona?"

"Yes, he did," replied the conte; "and the account surprised me as much as it can do you, as, from your history of him, it appeared to me that he had, for many years past at least, resided at his villa which had borne his own name, in the neighbourhood of Genoa."

"Undoubtedly he did," replied Ave-

rilla. "I myself knew him to be a resident there for nearly four years previous to my acquaintance with you ; and I had understood, both from himself and the lady Bianca, his relation, that he had been born on the spot, and had never resided any where else. Did you not mention to him your surprise at hearing him say that he had never lived any where but on the mountains ?"

"No, I did not," replied Della Piacca ; "I conceived that this false account of his place of residence might be a part of the mystery in which you have told me he is fated to live ; and I forbore to infringe upon my promise to you, by hinting at the secret in which he is enveloped."

"But where he has lived," rejoined Averilla, "has no connection with the secret that he has entrusted to me, no, no, none in the least." She paused. "He said also, did he not, that, until within about a month before his coming to Turin, he had been ignorant of his own name?"

“ Yes, even so,” the conte answered; “ the old man with whom he had lived on the mountains, disclosed it to him on his death-bed.”

“ Gracious Heaven !” exclaimed Averilla, “ I have for years past heard individuals of every rank call him by the name of Di Rosalva, in the neighbourhood where he dwelt. His father, I have frequently heard him say, had lived from his youth upwards in the villa di Rosalva, which was a family estate; but had been dead about ten years when I first knew him; and since the death of his father, he added, that he had never slept a single night away from the villa.”

“ It is impossible,” said the conte Lorenzo, “ that I should be able to guess at the reason for which, in the account of his past life, he deviates so much from fact, as your knowledge of him proves he does, if you cannot yourself devise any motive for it.”

“ But I still have not proposed to you the question,” said Averilla, “ in which I most materially wish my doubts to be

resolved. Do you really believe that if this Rodovina Maritos had not imposed on him her daughter for the signora Lucia Eldorado, but that it had been the real Lucia who had met his addresses, that he intended to have performed the marriage promise to which his name appeared signed ?”

“I cannot have the slightest doubt of it,” replied the conte. “If any thing can be gathered from the expression of the features, that of his countenance, while he spoke of his first becoming acquainted with the daughter of Rodovina in the church of Saint Luke, betrayed him to have been most passionately in love with her; and he also confessed to me in the court, that to have become her husband, had her character been such as a man of honour could have allied himself to as a wife, would have been the greatest happiness this earth could have afforded him.”

“Alas, poor Sylvio! unhappy friend!” exclaimed Averilla; “thy misfortunes have touched thy reason! This we have

often feared was the case, while I lived at the palazzo del Alvaretti. Often have we been apprehensive that calamity had bewildered the sense of our friend, and it is now but too evident that such is the case, if Sylvio declares that it was his intention to have become the husband of Lucia Eldorado."

"Of her in particular, do you mean?" asked Della Piacca.

"Of her, or any one," replied the contessa. "What can I do to serve him? Something, I am sure, I ought to attempt, to save him from the ruin into which this conduct may lead him. Surely the kind, the affectionate old Bianca, cannot be acquainted that this nervous extravagance, for I will not call it by a harsher name, hangs on his faculties. I think I ought to see her, to explain to her that measures should be pursued for ensuring his safety."

"If his powers of reason are affected," replied the conte, "he covers the heat of his brain with a composure very unusual to those thus afflicted. His narrative

was of the most distinct and interesting nature, unmixed with any starts of passion, or any of those irregularities which scenes, described by persons whose sense is wandering, are ever marked by."

"Nay, nay," returned Averilla, "this idea of marriage is to me sufficient conviction of his reason being disturbed; but can you yourself want a farther proof than that of his addressing the court concerning a suspicion which he told the judge he entertained of Rodovina's being acquainted with the secret of his birth, when I have every evidence that he is himself perfectly acquainted with every circumstance relating to it?"

Several minutes passed in silence, during which the thoughts of Averilla and her husband were directed towards the same object, although to different points of it. The contessa at length spoke: "I will instantly write to the signora Bianca; I can express my fears openly to her, without any infringement on my vow."

"You mean, her I saw in the carriage

with him a few days ago?" said the conte.

"The same," replied Averilla.

"The hotel of the Good Samaritan, where Sylvio lodges, professes only to entertain gentlemen," said the conte.

"But it is very unlikely they should be in different lodgings," replied Averilla; "for I, a few months ago, heard Sylvio say, that they had never passed a day asunder since his birth."

"I may be mistaken with regard to the nature of the hotel," rejoined the conte Lorenzo, "and most likely I am, as it is one I have seldom been in. I think you had better write; it is, at all events, right that a friend, of the nature you describe her to be to Sylvio, should be apprized of your unpleasant suspicions, even if they are false, which I earnestly hope they may be."

"Oh no, no, they cannot be false!" answered the contessa, and immediately began her letter.

When Averilla had finished writing,

she expressed a wish that a trusty messenger might be sent with it, and Bernardo was accordingly summoned for that purpose.

“Go,” said the conte, “to the hotel of the Good Samaritan; inquire for the signora Bianca di Rosalva, to whom that letter is directed, and give it into her own hands.”

During the absence of Bernardo, Sylvio and the strangeness of his adventures, were the sole topics of the conte and contessa; but a retrospection of the past did but tend to confuse their ideas concerning him, instead of elucidating the mystery in which he had heretofore stood enveloped alone to the conte, but which was now become enigmatical even to the contessa herself.

At the expiration of rather more than an hour, the major-domo Bernardo returned. He approached the table at which Averilla was sitting, and laying the letter upon it, which he had received from her hands, he said—“There is no

such lady at the hotel of the Good Samaritan."

"You should have inquired of some one belonging to the signor Sylvio di Rosalva, where she resides, as she is undoubtedly in the city," returned Averilla.

"I did so, contessa," replied Bernardo, "as I judged her to be a relation of the signor Sylvio di Rosalva. I desired the waiter of the hotel to request him to send me down information where I might find her."

"And what was his answer?" asked Averilla, impatiently.

"Just as I had said this," answered Bernardo, "he appeared upon the stairs himself, going out with another gentleman, and I proposed my question to him; he replied, that he knew no one of her name, and that I must be mistaken in supposing she belonged to him."

"Unaccountable!" exclaimed Averilla. "Do you think he knew you?"

"I believe not, at least I should guess so, for the stairs were so dark, that I

think he could not see enough of my face to recollect me," replied the major-domo.

"You need not wait, Bernardo," said the contessa, and the major-domo left the room.

"Is not this," exclaimed Averilla, the moment she was left alone with her husband, "a confirmation of the sad state of Sylvio's mind, to disavow a knowledge of one who, were his reason still perfect, as it once was, it would be his chief pleasure to acknowledge to the world as his best-beloved friend?—Surely, my dear husband, it must be my duty immediately to find her out in person, that I may not only warn her of the malady which has seized upon the brain of our common friend, but also assist her in devising some means for placing a restraint upon his actions, if possible, without curtailing the enjoyments of his existence."

"He comes hither to-morrow to dine, by appointment," replied the conte: "would it not be better to defer your design till that time? I will leave you

alone with him; I will, if you please, be called unexpectedly to dine abroad, and give you the whole day for conversation with him. Perhaps, if you too hastily remark upon his late extraordinary conduct, you may raise his malady to a greater height; if you cautiously proceed to speak of it, you may, by the soothing friendship of your words, bring him to a conviction of the strangeness of his past actions."

"How kind is my Della Piacca," replied Averilla, "in this proposition! Implicitly he relies on the honour of his wife, who will not wound the noble delicacy of his nature, by the paltry assurance that his happiness will be ever the dearest to her, though the ties of humanity appeal to her heart in the behalf of another object. I will, therefore, without hesitation, say, that I accept your proposal of being left alone to-morrow with Sylvio. I have reason to believe that in a few hours private conversation with him, I shall have it in my power to relieve his mind from a

part, at least, of the burthen under which it labours."

"So it shall be, then," replied the conte; "Flavia shall ride with me to my farm, and we will return in the evening, and meet Sylvio at supper, without any apparent consciousness of design in having been from home at dinner.

"There is one point in the occurrences of this day," said the conte Lorenzo, after a short pause, "which I cannot so easily reconcile my mind to, as you appear to do yours: I am convinced that Rodovina Maritos expressed more than a common emotion of features, when Sylvio informed the court of his suspicion of her having some acquaintance with the secret of his fate."

"And would not you yourself have felt surprised," returned Averilla, "if any one had declared himself ignorant of his birth, and accused you to a public court of having some concealed knowledge of it?—I do not wonder at even a wretch like Rodovina betraying asto-

ishment at such a declaration being made concerning her."

"Do you think it impossible that she should know any thing concerning him? You are yourself entrusted with a secret by him," said the conte.

"Which is known alone to me and the signora Bianca," replied Averilla; "and if he supposed a third person to be acquainted with it, he would much rather use means to procure their silence upon it, than to provoke them to its publication—least of all in a court of justice."

A tear had started in Averilla's eye as she spoke; the conte observed it, and his feelings gaining warmth from the evident emotion of hers, he exclaimed—"Heaven restore him to happiness!"

"Indeed, indeed, he merits the reward of Heaven!" replied the contessa; "his unhappiness is one of those mysteries which Heaven conceals from the eyes of its creatures. Were it in any instance allowable to arraign the justice of Providence, it would surely be so in

the case of the unfortunate Sylvio di Rosalva, who, doomed from his birth to a life of the most cruel, most uncommon nature, instead of receiving from Providence strength equal to the trials through which he is destined to pass, loses even his reason, in a cause in the producing of which he has himself had no concern. But I am wanton in my speech; Heaven cannot be unjust, and sooner or later, the virtues of Sylvio must be rewarded; and great will be his recompence, if the remuneration be equal to the pangs of the sufferer."

The contessa rose from her seat, and walked about the apartment, in order to stifle the rising emotions of her mind. After some minutes thus passed, she turned suddenly towards her husband, and drawing a letter from her pocket as she spoke, exclaimed—"In commiserating the lot of one friend, I have entirely forgotten to inform my Lorenzo of the tidings of a more joyful nature, which I have this day received from one who is equally dear to us—I mean of

our beloved Felix. Read that letter from the signora Del Alvaretti, and tell me whether we ought to join with her in her present hopes, or to lament that her expectations have more probably been only raised to meet a disappointment, which it had been better to have spared her."

The conte received the letter from the hand of his wife, and read the following contents:—

—

" MY DEAREST AVERILLA,

" Not that I am conscious that any pleasurable sensation communicated to the heart of my Felix, or myself, gives equal pleasure to yours, but that I myself experience a double happiness in communicating my joyful prospects to you, I write to you at a moment when trembling anxiety almost unfits me for the task. Oh, my Averilla, the blessing of his sight is promised to our dear Felix! May Heaven look down with pity on the resignation with which

he has hitherto borne the darkness of existence, and in its mercy second the attempts of the benevolent being, who has offered himself to me as competent to open his eyes to the light of day! But I will command myself sufficiently to relate to you what has already transpired concerning this event, on which my entire, my anxious soul is now fixed.

—This morning I was informed that an aged man, in the garb of a peasant, sought to see me. I went to him, and found him a man of a most mild and benevolent aspect, whose manners were entirely devoid of the usual clownishness of the peasantry, and who spoke in a language both feeling and eloquent.—He informed me that he had, for years past, made the study of physic his favourite pursuit; that amongst other discoveries, he had fallen upon one, with which he had frequently had the happiness of restoring to sight those who had been deprived of that blessing, by the inveteracy of disease, or the stroke of lightning; that he had never yet made

the attempt upon any one who had been born blind ; but that having heard of my son's case, he had come to make me an offer of his endeavours. He judged, he said, that those who had been gifted by Heaven with the power of more acute discernment into the nature of herbs, which were applicable to the purposes of physic, were, of all other men, the most sinful in the eye of Heaven, if they did not, unsought, make offers of their skill to those who stood in need of relief ; and that having heard of the unfortunate situation of the signor Felix, he had journeyed hither, purposely to declare himself willing to exert the utmost of his skill in his behalf. I acknowledged, with all the gratitude I felt towards him, the kindness of the old man's offer, and immediately set before him refreshments, at the same time introducing, by his desire, my son into the apartment ; but, ere he entered it, I besought him not to mention to Felix the business which had brought him to the palazzo, as I could not bear the idea

of raising in his breast hopes which might eventually prove futile. He promised me that he would not ; and some trivial excuse having been alleged to Felix for the visit of the stranger, the old man, after some time, made the blindness of Felix, as it were, the accidental conversation of the moment, and, as we continued to discourse, he begged Felix to permit him to look at his eyes. This our amiable Felix, with his usual cheerfulness, readily permitted ; and the old peasant, after the inspection of a few moments, whispered me in the ear—‘ I think I can promise to give him sight.’ It was, indeed, at that moment, difficult for me to confine my feelings within my own breast ; but my resolution did not forsake me. When I had again an opportunity of conversing apart with the old man, he repeated to me what he had before whispered in my ears, and begged me to consent to his process. I told him that I could not give my consent, without I was permitted so to do by my husband, and

that I would, for that purpose, immediately send a messenger to Genoa, to request his presence at the villa del Alvaretti. I have accordingly dispatched the messenger, and detained the old man as a visitor at the villa. We have told Felix that he was formerly a tenant on the estate, and is come to pay his respects to me as he passed this way. What I have hitherto written I am sure must be almost ineligible; but if my dear Averilla can decypher the characters, I am certain she will not quarrel with the penmanship. I have snatched a moment, while my unsuspecting Felix, for whom my every nerve now trembles with hope, amuses himself with his favourite flute. I could not defer to write to you till I had seen my husband, because you would have received intelligence a day the later, of this ray of hope which has broken upon us; and that I knew you would chide me for not making you acquainted with it, the moment I was myself cheered with its prospect. Farewell, my dearest Averilla; to-morrow I

will write again. Oh if I could have to tell you that Felix—but I will not anticipate too warmly, lest the indulgence of hope should render me unable to bear the shock of disappointment. I know you will pray for our success; I will therefore only say, Heaven prosper the prayers of my Averilla! and conclude myself your most affectionate aunt,

“FELICIA DEL ALVARETTI.”



“Ah me!” said the conte, “I have indeed my fears of the disappointment which she dreads; the old man who has presented himself to her, owns that those to whom he had already given sight, were not born deprived of the faculty. I am also, I confess, incredulous of the skill of irregular practitioners of the art of medicine, in cases where able physicians have declared it can be of no avail.”

“There can be no doubt but that the consent of the signor Rossano was easily obtained to the experiment,” replied

Averilla ; “ his feelings have always been so much wounded by this calamity being attendant on the sole male heir he possesses, that he will readily agree to any proposal that may promise but the shadow of a hope for remedying the defect. It is therefore by this time, I dare say, decided, whether my poor Felix is ever to be blessed by beholding the light of day, or not.”

“ The signora Felicia says, in her letter,” returned Della Piacca, “ that she will write again immediately after she has seen her husband ; you will therefore, probably, have another letter to-morrow morning, about the time that you received this to-day.”


“ And to-morrow,” returned the contessa, “ is my interview with Di Rosalva to take place. What two unfortunate beings come at this very moment under our confined knowledge of the world’s inhabitants ! and as there can be little doubt that happiness and misery are scattered with an equal hand, over the face of the globe in all its parts, how

grateful ~~does~~ it become those, who, like ourselves, are unhappy only in sympathy with the distressed, to prove themselves, for the lenity with which the adverse winds of heaven blow over them, in their course to their fellow-beings !”

“ And how eminently do those deserve the protection of Heaven,” exclaimed the conte, pressing his wife to his breast as he spoke, “ who are so conspicuously, as yourself, the representative of its celestial purity on earth !”

CHAP. II.

THE following morning, on the arrival of the post from Genoa, the conte’s prediction of the former evening was fulfilled, by a second letter being brought to Averilla ; the superscription was in the well-known hand of the signora Del Alvaretti. The contessa hastily tore it open, and read the following lines:—



“ MY DEAREST NIECE,

“ All is still suspense, with regard to the light or darkness in which our dear Felix is doomed to pass his future days. Late in the evening, or rather towards the night of yesterday, your uncle Rossano arrived here, in compliance with the message I had sent to him. Unwilling to be called, without the assignment of a cause attendant on the summons, from his own concerns, he presented himself before me in one of those dispositions which you have often seen check the impulse that I have felt to meet him as the father of my children. I trusted to the communication I had to unfold to him, to sooth his ruffled temper, and accordingly, calling him into a private apartment, I, without preface, related to him the offer of the old peasant, who was at that moment an inmate of the palazzo.—You have ever known what have been his feelings with regard to my Felix being deprived of that most essential faculty of which he

has never known the enjoyment ; more acute, I fear, from a selfish disappointment in his male descendant, than from parental commiseration for the infirmity of his son. However, in whatever cause they originated, as you are well acquainted with their strength, it is unnecessary for me to expiate with how great warmth he grasped at the possibility of his release from darkness.

“ He instantly commanded the old peasant to be brought into his presence. The old man recounted to him the benevolent purpose of his visit, in the same words which he had done to me ; and my husband replied—‘ Let your experiment take place with the morning of to-morrow, and if you succeed, ample shall be your reward.’ The old man returned—‘ I seek no reward of the nature which you propose to me ; the only reward by which my feelings can be gratified is, a promise which you must make to me before I enter upon the attempt of giving your son his sight, and without which I shall not make the attempt at

all.'—'What is it?' asked Rossano; 'if in my power to grant, conclude it already yours.'—'Promise me,' replied the old man, 'that if I give your son the use of that faculty of which he has hitherto been deprived, that you will neither oblige him ever to become the husband of any one whom he dislikes to receive as the partner of his life, nor withhold him from forming any connection which may be eventual to his happiness.'—'These are strange conditions,' replied my husband—'conditions to which, as the father of one through whom the descent of an honourable family is to be preserved, I cannot agree. What possible motive can you have for desiring I should?'—'My request,' returned the peasant, 'proceeds from the double motives of humanity and justice. Were I to suffer him to remain in the state of darkness he is now in, it is very unlikely that he should ever wish to marry, or that you should desire him so to do; but the moment sight is given

to him, it appears probable that you will be eager to connect him with some family which may, by the alliance, add to the splendour of your own, and also that the passion of love may steal into his heart. Therefore, as I may be the means of exposing him to both these contingencies, by opening his eyes to the light of day, I judge myself only to be acting as it becomes me to do, when I obtain a promise from you, not to exact from him any sacrifice which may cause him to repent what my skill has been able to do for him.'

" Here the matter rests; my husband declares himself unable to determine whether it becomes him to make this promise or not. Oh that it rested alone with me! Can any promise be too great, in return for the blessing of our son's sight? I hope, I think, I shall at last induce him to give it; he has taken the day to reflect upon it, and to converse more at large with the old peasant. Almighty Heaven grant that his mind may be won to the proffered good! and

may Heaven forgive him if, from any selfish motive, he rejects the blessing which is presented to his acceptance!—
 Adieu, my dearest Averilla; I am sure that you, like me, will venerate the humanity of the old peasant, in thus providing for the future happiness of one whom his skill is to render a new inhabitant of the world; or, more properly, to make the world a new habitation. Once more, farewell; your affectionate aunt,

“FELICIA DEL ALVARETTI.”

The conte and contessa, especially the latter, read this letter of the signora Felicia Del Alvaretti with an emotion equal to that with which she had written it. They were both so well acquainted with the family pride and avaricious temper of Rossano, that they feared he never would be induced to grant his son the blessing even of his sight, upon the condition of his being unrestrained in the choice of a partner for his future days.

"Pray Heaven he may be won to it!" exclaimed Averilla. "I have a strange, a bewildered idea upon the motive of the old peasant for making this request. I think—and yet it cannot be possible that——"

She was interrupted by a servant announcing to the conte, that his carriage, which was to carry him to his farm, was ready for his departure.

The ideas which burst upon the mind of the conte, at receiving this information, rendered him less attentive than he perhaps otherwise would have been to the incoherent exclamation which Averilla had just made with regard to Felix. Sylvio entered his mind, and he said—"The hour is approaching at which you are to expect Di Rosalva."

"I would the hour were past," returned Averilla; "I dread it."

"Do you wish me then not to go out to-day," asked the conte, "but to remain at home, and meet Sylvio myself at dinner with you?"

"No, by no means," said the contes-

sa; "let it be as we have before agreed to it."

The conte and his daughter accordingly departed, and the contessa continued alone, awaiting the arrival of Sylvio.—The present, she considered, would be a most favourable opportunity for granting him that conversation apart from the conte, which in his letter he had requested of her; and she enjoyed the soothing expectation of its being in her power to render him more happy than she had lately seen him.

A few minutes before the appointed dinner hour, Sylvio arrived at the palazzo della Piacca. The contessa received him with the utmost friendliness, and having explained to him that her husband was detained from home, she led him into the dining-room, where she continued to converse with him upon different topics, till the repast was placed upon the table; desiring to defer the subject, which she doubted not Sylvio was as anxious as herself to discuss, till the cloth should be removed, and

their conversation be free from interruption on the part of the servants, some of whom were now constantly in the apartment, making preparations for dinner.

The meal being concluded, and every servant retired, the contessa said—
“ Well, my dear friend, we have now an opportunity for conversing without restraint, an opportunity which, believe me, I have long desired, but from which circumstances have till now withheld me.”

“ You do me great honour,” replied Sylvio.

“ Call it not an honour,” returned the contessa, “ that is too cold a word between friends like 'ourselves; call it rather by any name, that will convince you I esteem and respect you.”

Sylvio bowed in silence.

“ Nay, do not hesitate,” continued the contessa, “ to open your heart to me; you can have no cause to blush at revealing its secrets to me. I have never given you reason to doubt my

friendship; and if you have argued otherwise of me than as one who feels the warmest interest in your happiness, indeed you have wronged me. Come, explain to me the mystery of the marriage promise, upon which you were yesterday summoned to appear before the court of justice."

"The mystery of it, contessa!" exclaimed Sylvio.

"Yes," replied Averilla; "what could induce you to give it?"

"Have you not had it explained to you," asked Sylvio, "that I was deceived in the woman to whom that promise was made; that I had believed her as amiable as she was beautiful, till the vileness of her character was revealed to me?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I have," returned Averilla; "but however amiable you might have thought her, there must have been some concealed motive for your giving her a promise of marriage."

Sylvio smiled, with an expression of

surprise painted on his countenance, and said—"No, indeed, contessa, I had but the single motive of believing her a woman capable of adding to the happiness of my life."

"Had you then declared yourself to her?" inquired Averilla, with marks of equal surprise on her countenance.

"I had revealed to her my heart, and she had received the confession in a manner that had given me every prospect of felicity," replied Sylvio.

"It was, undoubtedly, very fortunate that you found her thus disposed," returned Averilla; "but still I think there must be much danger, even in the idea of such an union. What necessity could you have to place your happiness in the power of any woman but myself, while we have the opportunity of continuing the friends we now are?"

"As far as friendship can add happiness to life," replied Di Rosalva, "I certainly shall never meet with any who are more capable of administering it to my mind, than the conte Della Piacca

and yourself. You are the only friends, except one who is now no more, whom I have ever known."

"You forget your best beloved friend, Felix del Alvaretti," replied the contessa.

"Felix del Alvaretti!" replied Sylvio; "I am entirely ignorant to whom you allude."

"What!" exclaimed Averilla, "forgetful of Felix!—of that Felix to whom the warmest sentiments of your heart were so lately devoted! You are trifling with me. I entreat you," added she, in a softened tone of voice, for she dreaded that she saw her suspicion of his insanity confirmed in his denial of Felix, "to endeavour to collect your thoughts."

In the earnestness of her mind, the contessa had taken the hand of Sylvio in hers; he withdrew it resolutely from her, and said—"Pardon me, signora, but from your conduct I cannot help supposing, that the recollection of thought which you recommend to me, is as necessary to yourself."

"Alas, Sylvio!" replied Averilla, "it



is the malady of your own mind which leads you to believe mine distempered. I do not wonder that the miseries you have been doomed to experience from your cradle, have led you into a conduct unlike your fellow-beings; but trust in me; let me find means to sooth your sufferings—to compose your feelings; and, first of all, let me endeavour to convince you that your words and actions do not agree.”

The faculties of Sylvio appeared bound up in astonishment, and he suffered Averilla to proceed without interruption.

“Do you recollect,” she continued, “that you yesterday declared, in the court of justice, that you never had, till within the last eight months, resided any where but on the mountains of Tortona; that you were ignorant of your parents, and that you had only for a few weeks, previously to your coming to this city, been acquainted with your own name?”

“Undoubtedly I made those declarations to the judge,” answered Sylvio.

“ If you do remember this,” returned Averilla, “ let me, by that recollection, endeavour to convince you that your imagination wanders. Look on me ; does not my presence recal to your mind scenes and ideas which you must have entirely forgotten to have existed, at the time you yesterday addressed what you called a narrative of your life to the court ? Are you not assured that it is Averilla del Alvaretti, who at this moment addresses you ? Does not her countenance bring with it to your mind the remembrance of the villa di Rosalva ? —the good signora Bianca, your aunt ? —the poor blind Felix ?—the letter which Rossano caused to be written to you when the conte Della Piacca first proposed himself as my husband ?—the Gladiator from which you fled in alarm in the garden of the palazzo del Alvaretti ?”

“ Contessa !” exclaimed Sylvio, “ I cannot guess at what you are aiming by these questions, which appear to me the result of a heated brain. Is it a page of

romance that you are reciting by rote? —What can be your motive for these unaccountable demands?"

"Oh, Sylvio!" cried Averilla, "how it distresses me to see you thus! If every other circumstance has fled from your memory, surely you cannot have forgotten the church of Saint Francis—the vow I pledged to you at the altar of that saint—the secret you then entrusted to my keeping!"

A pause ensued; Sylvio appeared as if undecided whether or not to fly from the presence of Averilla, as one whose reason he supposed to be disordered; and she continued to fix her eyes on him, as if expecting him to recollect the facts she had repeated to him.

"A secret, and between us!" exclaimed Sylvio, appearing at the moment he spoke prepared to burst into laughter.

"Yes, yes!" answered Averilla. "Did you not there confess to me that you were—a *woman*?"

Till this moment astonishment had been the only expression apparent on

the countenance of Di Rosalva; his eye now beamed with the animation communicated to it by a heart stung with insult. He darted upon the contessa a look of fierceness, which she had never before believed him capable of; but appearing suddenly to recollect that the sex of her from whose tongue the insult had proceeded rendered her still secure from active revenge, he replied, in a tone half smothered by the contending feelings of his mind—"For what reason I have been invited hither to-day, to meet this insult from one to whose family accident had rendered me serviceable, I cannot guess; I however can, and shall, take care not to expose myself to a repetition of this degradation."

He moved hastily towards the door. The contessa followed him, and seizing hold of his arm, exclaimed—"Sylvio, Sylvio, do not leave me thus! That I can be mistaken in what I have said is impossible. Tell me, only tell me, have you not a scar on the wrist of your left arm?"

With a start, which expressed the greatness of his surprise at the demand which the contessa now advanced to him, he again disengaged himself from her, and said—"Often have I read of the sorcery practised by your sex, but never till now had a proof of its existing powers; for by sorcery alone it must be that you are informed of my being marked with a scar on the wrist of my left arm; and as this conviction furnishes me with a proof that your intentions towards me cannot be conducive to my honour, and my good, I feel an increased anxiety to fly for ever from your presence!" and as he spoke these words, he opened the door of the apartment. The contessa endeavoured to detain him, and accompanied her action with words to the same import, but he darted from her; and, before she could sufficiently collect herself to call to any one who might have prevented his leaving the house, he was gone beyond recal.

CHAP. III.

THE contessa clasped her hands in agony, and continued standing upon the spot where Sylvio had left her with upraised eyes, as if they were directed to Heaven, to implore its explanation of the mystery, which she could not herself develop.

That the ill-starred being, who had ever been believed a male by the world, but who had with tears declared herself a woman to Averilla, in the church of Saint Francis, had told her that at the moment she had believed Sylvio di Rosalva to be seeking her hand, the pretended Sylvio had but been endeavouring to summon resolution to impart to her the secret of her sex, and to implore her friendship; that that being should now fly from her, accuse her of insolence, and disavow a recollection of past circumstances, was an enigma that al-

most deprived her of reason, as she continued to dwell upon it, particularly as she had discovered too much matter in the replies of Sylvio on that day, to believe his brain affected; and still more as she reflected on the astonishment which he had testified when she had spoken to him concerning the scar which he bore on the wrist of his left arm, and by having avowed himself to be marked with which, he had, beyond all doubt, convinced her that he was the same person whom she had known at the palazzo del Alvaretti.

She could now only suppose that, from some motive with which she was unacquainted, he had made her the dupe of a false confession respecting his sex; that he was displeased with the chance which had introduced him again to an intimacy with her, and had conducted himself in the manner he had that day done, in order to disgust her, and provoke her to quarrel with him, which would relieve him from the necessity of visiting at the palazzo. But this sup-

position was again destroyed by the recollection of the letter which she had received from him, a few days before the present time, at the very hour when he was a guest of her husband's. This recollection again led her mind back to her former idea of his reason being affected.

Restrained, by her vow, from seeking advice of any one competent to assist her conjectures, she continued to dwell on the strangeness of Sylvio's conduct, till the subject became too painful to be endured, and she resolved to seek the means of liberating herself from the obligation of her vow, a measure which she deemed the recent conduct of Di Rosalva to have rendered essential, both to the peace of her own mind, and the happiness of those with whom she was connected.

When the conte returned, which he did at an early hour in the evening, Averilla said—"You are, I doubt not, surprised to find Sylvio gone?"

"You mean that he has not been here at all, do you not?" returned the conte.

"He dined with me," replied the contessa; "but——"

"But," added the conte, taking up her words, "it must have been a very late dinner, for we met him and the old lady, whom I once before saw with him, in a carriage coming towards the city, just as we reached a farm house on the road towards Genoa, where we passed the afternoon. I was so surprised at the rencontre, that I called to his driver to stop; but he did not hear me, or at least did not attend to me, for he continued driving towards the city at a very rapid pace, which probably proceeded from his desire of being punctual to his appointment."

"Did you indeed see Sylvio with the signora Bianca?" returned Averilla; "how strange that he should have denied all knowledge of her yesterday evening to Bernardo, when he went to seek her with my letter! He must have flown to the city," she added, after a pause, "for he arrived here in perfectly good time for dinner,"

“Flown, indeed,” echoed the conte, with a laugh; “it is almost an impossibility, from the distance at which I saw him from the city, that he could reach you in any tolerable time for dinner.”

“He was, nevertheless, rather before than after his time,” answered Averilla.

“And yet you do not appear surprised,” rejoined Della Piacca.

“I am stupified with a train of surprises,” said Averilla; “but ask me no questions to-night. Let father Philippo be summoned to attend me to-morrow morning; I shall ask his advice respecting the religious propriety of my being released from the obligation of my vow to Sylvio di Rosalva. I am of opinion that circumstances are such as no longer render it a virtue in me to keep it sacred.”

“Do you then no longer believe his reason to be affected by his misfortunes?” asked her husband.

“I know not what to think,” replied the contessa; “I am only convinced in my own opinion, that it is for his good

and mine, that I be released from the vow which now confines my tongue; and I wish father Philippo to give me his advice on this distressing point."

"A clock struck four," said the conte, "just as we saw the signor in a carriage with the old lady."

"And the clock struck four just as he entered this house," replied Averilla.

"The clocks must differ greatly then," remarked the conte.

"They must, indeed," replied Averilla, while, for the first time of her experiencing the sensation, a cold trembling stole over her frame, and she almost entertained a doubt, whether Sylvio were not a being of another world, suffered to haunt her existence, and cause her to doubt the impossibility of the occult powers.

At an early hour Averilla retired to rest, anxiously desiring the arrival of the morning, which should bring to her relief the confessor Philippo. Not less earnestly did the conte himself wish for the dawn of day; he perceived the agi-

tation of his Averilla's mind to be very great, and he was impatient for the moment at which the voice of religion might permit her to reveal what was passing in her heart, to the sympathy of an affectionate husband.

About nine in the morning the father Philipppo arrived; he was a man of the most mild and benevolent manners; with him religion appeared in those alluring points of view, of which the more severe only robe her by their assumed gravity.—He had won the heart of Averilla since her residence in Turin, and she felt no reluctance in opening to him her soul.

He heard her with indulgence and compassion. The case, he said, in which she was involved, was a peculiar one; he would meditate on the consistency and contingent justice of her departing from a vow made at the altar of her tutelary saint, and visit her again when he had formed his opinion.

For several hours the contessa had been closeted with the father Philipppo.

When she met the conte at dinner, she communicated to him the reply of her confessor, and expressed her regret at not yet being allowed to impart to him the secret which alone filled her breast; and her dread lest she should be ultimately withheld from disclosing it to him at all.

"It will not abate my love for you, if even this should be the case," said the conte; "the attempt which you have made to participate it with me, is enough to free you from every imputation of a selfish or unjust taciturnity towards me."

"But perhaps it is at this moment equally selfish to seek the permission of divulging it, since I confess that it arises from my need of advice, in the strait into which my incautious vow has led me," returned Averilla.

"And when," replied the conte, "can a wife display a greater reverence for the husband of her affections, than in deeming his advice competent to extricate her from that circle of difficulty, in which every passenger through life is, at

some moment of his existence, held a prisoner by the power of destiny?—Come, come, be as cheerful as your sympathy in the fate of the unhappy Sylvio will permit you to be, and if your well-disposed intentions have been abused by those on whom they have been conferred, believe that in me you will still find one who will ever applaud the benevolence of your motives, and pity you where their events are contrary to the correctness of your heart.”

The contessa was on the point of replying to her husband, through a mist of tears which veiled her eyes, when the major-domo entered the apartment, and appeared to wish to speak. He had uttered a syllable or two, but deeming, from the emotion which he saw depicted on the countenance of Averilla, that his intrusion was untimely, he made a hasty apology, and was departing.

“Bernardo,” said Della Piacca, recalling him, “what was it you were going to say? By your manner it ap-

peared to be something of more than common importance."

"I was going to tell you, signor," Bernardo replied, "that as I was, about two hours ago, crossing the square of Saint Gabriel, I saw a crowd at some distance from me. I inquired upon what account it was assembled, and found that the curiosity which most persons feel to behold an offender against the laws had collected it; for that the persons who composed it were surrounding Rodovina Maritos, who was conducting to the court of justice, in order to be examined on the accusation which the signor Charino Eldorado had preferred against her, in consequence of the discovery which the surgeon Sorato had made—that the old merchant's death had been occasioned by poison."

"And do you know what was the event of her examination?" asked Della Piacca.

"Yes, conte," replied the major-domo. "I was sufficiently curious to wait on the outside of the court, until the sitting

should break up, and some one come out who could give me information of what had been passing within. At length one of the officers appeared; I questioned him, and he informed me that Rodovina Maritos had declared that Sylvio di Rosalva had administered the poison to the merchant Eldorado, in order to accelerate his marriage with his daughter, as he had supposed Vitellia to be. The judge inquired of her if she could bring any witness to prove what she had advanced? She replied that she could; that her witness was a man named Michael Vivane. The judge asked where this Michael was to be found, and Rodovina immediately gave one of the officers of the court directions for that purpose. The judge then broke up the assembly, saying, that he should summon both Sylvio and Michael to meet Rodovina there on the morrow."

"It is impossible that a man like Di Rosalva can have been guilty of a crime of this nature," observed the conte;

“but I am not at all surprised at Rodovina’s endeavouring to defend her cause, by charging the accusation brought against herself upon him; and I make no doubt but that the Michael of whom she spoke, is some wretch of an equally despicable character as herself, whose infamy will easily be detected by the court.”

“Doubtless so, my lord,” returned Bernardo; “but this is not all I was going to tell you. Whilst I was in conversation with the officer, Rodovina was led out of the court, on her return to prison; and as the way I was going was the same which led towards it, I continued for some minutes to walk behind those who were conducting her. At the turn of a narrow street, where the meeting of several carriages for a short time choked up the passage, I perceived an elderly lady to be excited by that curiosity which was stimulating every other passenger to turn their eyes upon Rodovina, and suddenly I heard her exclaim—‘I cannot be deceived! it

is, it must be she !’ And having uttered these words, she darted through the crowd, and forcing her way up to Rodovina, addressed her by saying—‘ Do I then again behold you, wicked deceitful woman ! I know you well, you are the false Maria Calotti, who——’ The clamours of the crowd, to endeavour to learn what was passing, prevented me from hearing the conclusion of the sentence, as they did also the reply of Rodovina. But I guess that she disclaimed all knowledge of the old lady, for a momentary silence permitted me to hear her rejoin—‘ Not know me ! Oh, monstrous falsehood ! Not recollect Bianca di Rosalva, the nurse, the guardian, the mother of——’ Again the confused voices of the populace prevented me from hearing more ; the street was now become passable, and Rodovina’s conductors led her forward, followed by the old lady, who appeared determined not to lose sight of one, her sudden meeting with whom seemed to have filled her with the most violent emotions.”

"Proceed, Bernardo," said Averilla, eagerly.

"I have told you all I know, contessa," answered the major-domo; "for as it struck me that the old lady I have seen must be the signora Bianca di Rosalva, for whom you have lately been making such anxious inquiry, I thought I could not do better than instantly to return home, and impart to you the scene of which I have been a witness."

"Yes, yes," replied the contessa; "there can, from your description of her, be no doubt of its having been the signora Bianca."

"And does not this seem to prove," said the conte, "that Sylvio's reason was perfect, when he informed the court that Rodovina Maritos had some knowledge of his birth?—Shall I instantly go in quest of this old lady, and offer her my assistance in your name, towards the development of that secret, of which it now appears so fully evident that the infamous Rodovina is possessed?"

"No, my husband," replied Averilla,

“do not go in quest of her yet; I thank you for your kind intentions towards those in whom I take interest, but put them not instantly into effect. Towards the evening father Philippo said he would return to me; should he absolve me from my vow, if will then be in my power to give you much clearer instructions how to proceed, in the case before you, than I am now able to do.”

“So it shall be then,” replied Della Piacca.

“Would father Philippo were come!” exclaimed Averilla.—“But then, if on his arrival he should only declare that it will, in his opinion, be an offence against religion for me to break the seal of my vow—”

“I shall still be satisfied,” interrupted the conte, “that my Averilla is at peace with her own conscience.”

CHAP. IV.

As the twilight of evening was beginning to fall, the father Philipppo returned to the palazzo della Piacca. With the mingled emotions of hope and anxiety, the contessa heard of his arrival; and ordering him to be conducted into her closet, she immediately went thither to meet him.

In the course of half an hour the contessa returned to the apartment where she had left her husband; disappointment was legibly written on her countenance, and her words quickly confirmed that it was the sensation of her mind. "My appeal to father Philipppo has been in vain," she said; "he informs me that he regards the permission I have sought of him, as a point beyond his authority to allow, and that I must seek the grant I ask of the church, from higher authority than his."

The conte was beginning to reply; when he was interrupted by a voice, exclaiming—" Help! help! for mercy's sake!—Murder! murder! help!"

The apartment in which the conte and contessa were sitting fronted the street; the upper part of one of the casements was open, and through this were admitted the sounds which they had just heard. The conte ran to the window; it was not yet quite dark, and he exclaimed, as he looked out—" It is a gentleman attacked by bravoës! He runs up the steps of the colonnade, and they are pursuing him!"—And, having uttered these words, he fled hastily out of the room, and calling loudly upon his servants to follow him, he ran to the assistance of the imploring stranger.

Followed by several of his domestics, some of whom had brought lights with them, the conte hastened along the colonnade which led to the flight of steps he had seen the person ascending. They found a man extended on the ground,

from whose side the purple tide of life was gushing, but whose groans bespoke him not yet to have ceased to exist.

The conte Lorenzo commanded him immediately to be taken into the house, directing, at the same time, others of his servants to go in quest of the first surgeon they could find, and bring him to the relief of the wounded man.

The bravoës, if such had been the two men whom the conte had seen pursuing him up the steps of the palazzo, and little doubt could be entertained of their being such, were no longer visible.

The stranger having been taken into the house, was placed upon a couch; his wound was on his right side, immediately under the breast. The major-domo took a napkin, and endeavoured to bind it up, if possible, to prevent the further flowing of the blood, till the surgeon should arrive to pursue more effectual measures.

The wounded man did not speak, faint groans alone escaped his lips. The conte, taking a light, approached him to

examine his features, and learn what hope of life they gave him; and scarcely had his eye fallen upon the bleached visage of the sufferer, than he recognised in him Sylvio di Rosalva.

As no surgeon arrived immediately, the conte went to Averilla, and informed her who was the person that had been brought wounded into the palazzo. Averilla betrayed more anxiety than surprise at this intelligence, and replied—"Sylvio di Rosalva brought into this house wounded, and under the breast, say you!—then an illucidation of all past mysteries must very shortly take place."

A pause ensued.

The contessa broke it.—"Much as I lament the injury Sylvio has sustained, I cannot forbear thanking Heaven, after what passed yesterday between him and myself, and the refusal of father Philippo to absolve me from my vow, that chance has worked the necessity of revealing that which I am withheld from disclosing.—Had not Sylvio conducted himself towards me in the extraordinary

manner which he yesterday did, in your absence, I would have suffered any inconvenience, rather than have wished his secret betrayed ; but, as circumstances are, it will afford my heart a great relief to be disburthened from it."

Della Piacca could only listen to the declarations of his wife in silence and astonishment, unconscious what to conclude, from the necessity of which she spoke, of Sylvio's wound leading to a discovery of the existing secret between herself and him.

In a very short time one of the conte's servants returned with a surgeon, the first, as he informed his master, with whom he had been able to meet ; and this proved to be no other person than the signor Sorato, to whom our readers have already been introduced, on the trial of Rodovina Maritos.

The conte went out to meet him, and conduct him to Sylvio : Averilla followed him, and addressing the surgeon in an emphatic voice, she said—" I intreat you, sir, if any female assistance be re-

quired in the case of your patient, to summon me immediately to his chamber."

Sorato promised to obey, and followed the conte to the apartment where lay the bleeding Sylvio.

In about ten minutes time, Della Piacca returned to the room where he had left Averilla. He approached hastily towards her, and throwing his arms around her neck, he exclaimed, as he held her to his heart—"Exquisite pattern of exalted virtue, and unbroken friendship! The excellence of your conduct is now explained to me—the virtuous secret which you have constrained yourself to conceal, is disclosed! Sorato has discovered Sylvio to be—a *woman*!"

The tears burst into the eyes of the contessa, and when she could command her utterance, she replied to the conte in the same words in which she had before addressed him, on the same subject.—"I committed a fault in contracting any promise which bound me to the concealment of a secret from my husband: now that secret is disclosed to him, does

he forgive me, that I have forborne to add a vice to a fault, by resolutely forbearing to break through the vow that I had once pronounced?"

"I cannot forgive," replied the conte, "what I have never considered as an injury; and to a soul so eminently resolute in the exercise of virtue, as yours has displayed itself, the praise of those most interested in your happiness must be a trivial joy, compared with that reward which Heaven instils into your own heart."

"I confess I experience that reward," returned Averilla; "but believe me, even that reward is heightened by the unaltered affection of my husband. But tell me," added she, after a short pause, "is Sylvio's wound dangerous?"

"At present," returned the conte, "she is very faint, from the loss of blood she has sustained; she has not yet spoken, and Sorato requests that she may not, on any account, be disturbed, lest the exertion endanger her safety."

"I must—I must see her," rejoined

the contessa; "I cannot withhold my attentions from her at this moment—they will, I am certain, be more gentle than those of any other person." She moved towards the door of the apartment, but suddenly stopping, she addressed the conte Lorenzo, by saying—"This discovery of her sex is a certain proof of the frenzied state of her brain. When I yesterday addressed her upon the secret she had confided to me, she denied having entrusted me with it, declared herself not to be a female, and left me in anger, at my having insulted her by the supposition. You now perceive why you found me last night so much disturbed, and why I have, since that time, been thus anxious to be released from my vow. I judged it the only means by which I could convince you of the certainty I have invariably felt of her faculties being deranged, since my being acquainted with her having actually signed her name to a promise of marriage with a woman; and having accused that Rodovina, now in custody,

of being acquainted with the secret of her birth, when I am myself so fully convinced that no secret attended it."

"If the necessity she has been under of concealing her sex from the world, has been the cause of her reason being affected," replied Della Piacca, "she is, indeed, an object of pity. But what can be the cause of her having been attacked this evening, by the men whom I saw pursuing her up the steps of the palazzo, and by whom she was, doubtless, wounded?"

"We will talk of this hereafter," said the contessa. "I may at this moment be wasting time, which might, perhaps, be employed to her advantage and relief;" and with these words she left the apartment.

The contessa found her female friend still in a state of insensibility; the flowing of the blood was stanchèd, but her cheeks were bleached, and her lips, to which the contessa placed her face, were cold and trembling. The wound beneath her breast having been dressed, Sorato

ordered a restorative cordial to be administered to her ; the contessa raised her head upon a pillow, on the bed upon which she had been laid, and introduced the refreshing beverage into her mouth. In a short time after she had swallowed it, the unfortunate Sylvio made an effort to open her eyes, but she closed them again immediately on meeting the flame of the candle. The surgeon ordered it to be removed to the farther end of the apartment, and addressed to her several questions, which he hoped might excite her attention, but they were advanced by him in vain.

Some time after this she murmured forth the name of Bianca ; she repeated it twice, and added, in scarcely audible accents—" Dear friend, are you with me ?" The exertion, slight as it was, overpowered her, and she again fainted away.

" Do you think she will die ?" asked the contessa, addressing Sorato.

His answer was of that indefinite nature which expressed the indecision of

his own mind, as to the probability of her fate.—Averilla heard it with the most poignant anguish of heart. “Would to God,” she exclaimed, “that signora Bianca were here!” and, leaving the chamber, she went to seek her husband.

“Let us, my dear Lorenzo,” she said, “immediately send in quest of signora Bianca; Sorato has apprehensions for the life of Sylvio; I would not, for the worth of worlds that she should die without seeing her; besides, what we have in our agitation and surprise not recollected, consider the misery she must be enduring on account of Sylvio’s unexplained absence from her.”

“It shall be done,” replied the conte; “I will myself be one of those who shall go in search of her; but where, where shall we first make inquiry for her? where can our applications promise us the greatest chance of success?”

“Suppose,” rejoined the contessa, “they were first directed to the keeper of the prison where Rodovina Maritos is in custody.—Do you not remember that

Bernardo saw Bianca following her, as she was leading thither by the officers of justice?"

"Even so," answered Della Piacca; "but, my dear Averilla," he added, "even at this important moment I cannot forbear the delay of an instant, to ask you if you are not astonished at the coincidence which there appears between Sylvio's having declared Rodovina Maritos possessed of the secret of her birth, and of her most intimate friend, the signora Bianca, having attacked Rodovina this morning in the street, as one whose sight appeared both to surprise and delight her?"

"It is," replied Averilla, "an enigma which occupies much of my thoughts, and which I cannot solve. But I entreat you, let us, for the present, think only of such proceedings as the necessity of the hour requires of us."

The conte immediately sought the major-domo, and having dispatched him and several of his domestics different ways, in search of the signora Bianca,

he proceeded himself towards the prison of Rodovina Maritos.

CHAP. V.

THE keeper instantly attended to his request to see him, and having heard his inquiries, he replied, that he had seen an elderly lady, of the description he gave, follow his prisoner to the gate that morning, and that she had solicited him to suffer her to enter, and proceed to Rodovina's cell; but that as his office withheld him from granting this permission to any stranger, he had been obliged to shut the door upon her, and had not seen her since.

The conte hesitated for a moment whether he should visit Rodovina, and repeat his inquiries to her; but very little consideration informed him, that if Rodovina really was acquainted with the person of the signora Bianca, as it appeared almost doubtless she was, from what had passed in the morning at their

unexpected meeting, it was not at all probable that she could inform him where in the city she was to be found, and he therefore forbore to question her.

After having visited most of the principal hotels in the city, and many other places where he guessed it possible the old lady might have taken up her abode, he returned home to his palazzo. All his servants, except the major-domo, were come back, with the same ill success that had attended his own inquiries. In a few minutes after appeared Bernardo; his efforts, like the rest, had been fruitless.

Although the faintness of Sylvio continued as great as when the conte and his servants had left the palazzo, Sorato considered her symptoms more free from immediate danger; and as it was now one in the morning, it was judged, on every account, more advisable that a further search after the lady Bianca should be deferred till the light of day; Averilla consoling herself in the hope, that Bianca was so situated as to be ignorant

of Sylvio's absence from her lodging, wherever that might be.

The contessa expressed a desire of watching by Sylvio during the night; the conte raised no objection to her request, but entreated Sorato to remain her companion. This he readily agreed to; and all the rest of the family, except a couple of attendants, who were stationed in an adjoining chamber, retired to bed.

Sorato said, that quiet was the best medicine which could be administered to his patient; an uninterrupted silence was therefore preserved in the apartment. Towards the dawn of day Sylvio began to breathe more audibly than she had yet done, and Sorato, regarding this symptom as a proof of her having derived some small portion of strength from the medicines which he had administered to her, ventured to address her.

"Where am I?" she inquired, raising her head as she spoke.

"With me, with your friend, with your Averilla!" said the contessa.

“ With Averilla !” she returned ; “ oh, Heavens, give me your hand, and let me kiss it !” She drew it to her lips, and then again sunk down upon her pillow.

This was the first time, during the many months that they had been in the habit of frequently seeing each other, since Averilla’s residence in the city of Turin, that Sylvio had, by any single word, acknowledged the friendship which they had vowed to each other at the altar of Saint Francis, in the village del Alvaretti: the contessa therefore believed the words she had now uttered to be a proof of her returning reason, and dreaded that it might be the forerunner of her death.

She imparted her fears to Sorato, and he was compelled to confess that her apprehensions were similar to his own. On receiving this conviction of her fears, the tears burst into the eyes of Averilla ; but Sorato begged of her to retain her composure, assuring her that if the danger of Sylvio were even confirmed, which was not yet the case, the termi-

nation of her existence could not, by any means, be so near as she apprehended it to be.

Two hours passed in silence; Sylvio did not again attempt to speak, but it was evident that she did not sleep. At the expiration of that time, she said—“ My dear friend, Averilla, are you still with me ? ”

Averilla went to the side of the bed, and received her extended hand in hers.

“ How infinitely happy I am,” said Sylvio, “ in being with you in my present wretched situation ! I now perfectly recollect the occurrences of last night, and cannot sufficiently bless my fate for having given me to your protection.”

Averilla replied by pressing the hand of Sylvio, which she held in hers. Sylvio continued thus—“ Oh, my friend, how often have I desired again to clasp you to my breast ! have not you thought the same of me ? ”

“ Yes, indeed, I have,” answered Averilla ; “ can you need to be told so, after

what I said to you the day before yesterday? Oh, Sylvio, why did you then disavow all former recollection of me, and of your friend Felix? why deny to me the secret of your sex, which you had voluntarily entrusted to my keeping?"

"How strangely you talk!" replied Sylvio; "I know not what you mean by what you mention of the day before yesterday." She paused a few minutes, then added—"I am not able to converse now; my ideas are confused, and will not let me collect for utterance, what I would say.—Do not talk to me at present." Her eyes confessed the bewildered state of her brain, which signor Sorato observing, administered to her a composing draught, in a second portion of the restorative cordial; and in the course of another hour, he pronounced her to be sunk into a slumber.

About the time Averilla conjectured the conte to be risen, she went to his chamber; he met her at the door, and

after she had replied to his inquiries concerning Sylvio, she informed him of the letter which she had received from Sylvio, on the day that he was dining at the palazzo, during her confinement to her chamber, and telling him that in this letter he had directed her to send her answer to the hotel of the Holy Virgin. - She asked him whether he did not judge it most probable that he might there be furnished with some intelligence of the signora Bianca?—"This circumstance," she said, "had entirely escaped my recollection, till you had for some hours been retired to rest last night."

"There then, indeed, it appears most probable that I shall be able to gain the information we desire," returned the conte. "I did not go to that hotel in my rounds yesterday evening, because it is one of little note, in the suburbs of the city, and I judged it unlikely to be the abode of any persons of condition. And still," added the conte, "as her letter to you can be considered only as an

additional proof of her insanity, at the time she wrote it, it appears an even chance whether she knows more of this hotel than its name, or if ever she sent to inquire for your answer, directed for her at it."

"It is, however, in the present state of things, worth an inquiry," replied Averilla.

"It is, undoubtedly," returned Della Piacca; "and I judge it of so material consequence that we endeavour to find the signora Bianca, that to insure the inquiry being made with exactness, I shall go to the place myself."

The hotel of the Holy Virgin was at the opposite extremity of the city, to that at which stood the palazzo della Piacca. The conte having accordingly taken a hasty breakfast, previously to his departure, set out on his errand of inquiry.

During the absence of the conte Lorenzo, several of his friends, who had heard the rumour of a signor that had

been attacked and wounded by bravoës, having been received into the palazzo della Piacca on the preceding evening, called to inquire into the truth of the report. The contessa resolutely confining herself to the chamber of Sylvio, sent Bernardo to answer their inquiries, instructing him to reply solely to their questions concerning the event, and to say nothing of the discovery of Sylvio's sex, which had followed it.

About an hour after she had issued these commands, and before the conte was yet returned, the door of the chamber where she was sitting, by the bedside of Sylvio, was opened, and, as she looked towards it, she perceived Flavia, who, with a countenance of unusual earnestness, was beckoning to her to come out.

Supposing her husband to be returned with the desired intelligence concerning signora Bianca, or perhaps to have brought her with him, she directly complied with the signal of Flavia. As soon as she was in the gallery, and the cham-

ber door shut, Flavia exclaimed, in a tone of voice that betrayed her to be violently agitated—"Pray tell me, did not papa say it was the signor Sylvio, who saved my life, that was desperately wounded last night on the steps of our palazzo, and who now lies at the point of death in that chamber?"

"Yes, my child, yes," replied Averilla, "it is the same."

"No, no, indeed, it is not," returned Flavia; "look at him again, and convince yourself."

"I am already convinced," answered Averilla; "it is the same, I assure you."

"Oh mercy, is it indeed!" exclaimed the child, throwing her arms round the waist of the contessa, and clinging to her as she spoke, "then I have seen a ghost!"

"What, my love!" rejoined the contessa; "what do you mean, Flavia?"

"Yes, indeed, it is now sitting in the breakfast-apartment," replied Flavia; "I was going into the room just now, but seeing something there so very like Syl-

vio, at the moment I knew him to be in bed up stairs, and almost dying, I ran away again as soon as I had caught a glimpse of it, for I thought it could be nothing alive; and you see I was quite right, was not I?"

"My dear child," answered the contessa Della Piacca, "you must have been mistaken; your hasty view of the person whom you believed to be the signor Sylvio, has deceived you. For the sake of your future peace of mind, I must go down with you, and convince you of your error."

The child persisted in her tale, and was extremely unwilling to return to the apartment, from which she had just fled in alarm; but the contessa, fully conscious of the mischief of suffering the mind of youth to go unconvinced of the fallacy of its childish conceits and apprehensions, insisted on leading her down.

When they had descended the stairs, and were arrived within sight of the door of the breakfast-apartment, the contessa was startled by seeing several of the do-

mestics on the outside, whose looks were little more composed than those of the trembling Flavia. She could not forbear conceiving that others had been alarmed in the like manner as Flavia had described herself to have been ; but convinced, by the reason of her own mind, that every foolish terror and idea of such a nature can be explained, by those who have courage to investigate their error, she said—"Bernardo, what is the matter here?"

"Signora—contessa," replied Bernardo, stammering, "there is an occurrence which—which——"

Averilla was on the point of turning into the apartment, round the door of which the servants were collected, without waiting for the conclusion of Bernardo's sentence. He caught her arm, and withheld her from entering—"Pardon me, contessa," he said, "but do not enter—a prognostic of the death of the signor Sylvio di Rosalva has just appeared to me in that apartment."

"It rang at the gate, as naturally as

if it had been the signor himself, instead of his ghost!" exclaimed one of the servants; "and I, Heaven help me! durst not shut the door in its face, for fear it should owe me a grudge in the next world."

The contessa resolutely disengaged herself from the hold of Bernardo, and entered the apartment, where, seated on a sofa, she beheld a figure, which, had she not known Sylvio di Rosalva to be at that moment too ill to move, and in bed in the chamber which she had just quitted, she must have pronounced to be Sylvio di Rosalva herself.

Involuntarily she started at the sight. —Flavia shrieked, and snatching away her hand from that of Averilla, fled from the apartment; the servants echoed her cry, and likewise ran from the spot of terror.

The contessa herself certainly felt surprised, but she did not attempt to leave the apartment. The figure rose, and with a slight inclination of its head, said—"I do not wonder, signora, that you are

surprised at seeing me here again, after the strange method which you took the day before yesterday, to inform me that my visits here were unpleasant to you. But as I still feel an esteem for the conte Della Piacca, and have been informed that he has been wounded by bravoos, my visit is to him. I am happy to find that it is not so; but the conduct of your servants towards me has so much resembled what yours was the other day, that I must suppose they are authorized in it by their master; and I shall therefore await his return home, to inquire how I have provoked him and his family to offer me these insults."

Abstract ideas the contessa had at this moment none; a chaos of undigested visions filled her imagination, and she had not the power of utterance, could she have resolved what to say, which she found impossible.

The figure was preparing to speak again, when the conte Della Piacca entered the room, with signora Bianca leaning on his arm.

"Thank Heaven you are come!" exclaimed Averilla, addressing the conte Lorenzo.

"Dear lady, what do I not owe to your kindness," cried Bianca, catching hold of Averilla's hands; but no sooner had she spoken these words, than her eyes falling on the figure resembling Sylvio, she added—"What do I see! my child already recovered!" and saying this, she darted towards it with open arms.

"Your child!" exclaimed the figure.

"Are you not my Sylvio di Rosalva?" asked Bianca.

"I am Sylvio di Rosalva, most undoubtedly," replied the stranger; "and if you know me to be your child, why have you thus long deserted me?"

"Deserted you, dearest child!" exclaimed Bianca; "what can you mean?"

"You are in error, we are all in error," said the contessa, moving up to Bianca, and addressing her; "this is not the Sylvio di Rosalva who was brought hither yesterday evening wounded; this is not

the Sylvio di Rosalva to whom I bound myself by a vow of secrecy on her sex, in the church of Saint Francis, at Alvarretti.—Who or what it is that usurps her likeness, and her name, I have yet to learn—guess I cannot.”

“Heavenly God!” cried Bianca, “and are you, indeed, called Sylvio di Rosalva, and yet do not recollect ever to have seen me before?”

“Sylvio di Rosalva is my name,” replied the figure; “and yet do I not recollect ever to have seen you before.”

“Blessed be Heaven!” exclaimed Bianca, flying round his neck as she spoke, “he is found—he is found! he lives—he lives!—Oh God, accept our thanks!—You are the brother of my Sylvio, the twin brother of that Sylvio whose necessity of disguising the softness of her sex, beneath the habit of yours, ceases, now you are restored to us.”

The various emotions of the persons who formed this interesting group, may be easily imagined; broken exclamations

of joy and astonishment was all they were, for some time, capable of uttering.

Bianca was the first who spoke collectedly.—“ Yes, yes, you are indeed the lost Sylvio,” she said ; “ the resemblance you bear to one another, is a sufficient proof of your affinity. From the hour of your birth, you were distinguishable from each other only by your sex ; so strongly alike, that you both bear a scar on the wrist of your left arm.—Am I not right ? have you not that mark ? ”

Sylvio drew up the sleeve of his coat, and displayed the scar ; which done, he was beginning an apology to the contessa, for having construed her friendship for his sister into an insult intended to himself ; but the contessa enjoined him to immediate silence on that head. She said, that the circumstances in which fate had placed him, and those connected with him, were apologies, she hoped, for the misconception of the past, in his sister's friends, as well as himself ; and that, after so much sorrow and misfortune as they had both known, it was just that

no subject should be admitted to their thoughts, but the means of rendering their future lives happy.

CHAP. VI.

WHEN the agitation of mind into which every one present had been thrown, by the unexpected existence of two Sylvios, had in some measure subsided, and a few observations had been made upon the various errors which had arisen from the concealment of the female Sylvio's sex, and the recently-acknowledged Sylvio's ignorance of his birth, he entreated to be immediately conducted to that sister, whose breast he had never folded to his own; but as the contessa learnt that her slumbers still continued, she besought him not to disturb her repose, promising, that if she was sufficiently refreshed by her sleep, for no danger to be apprehended from the discovery being made

to her, he should visit her as soon as she awoke.

The conte Della Piaacca had found the signora Bianca at the hotel of the Holy Virgin, her mind upon the rack for the fate of her dear child, as she called Sylvio, whom she had not seen, or been able to hear of, since the hour of six on the preceding evening. In her way to the palazzo, she had told the conte of her desire to obtain an interview with Rodovina Maritos, and had entreated his assistance to that end, which he had promised her. Hitherto she had only said, that she trusted such an interview, if she could obtain it, would lead to a discovery of material consequence to the happiness of Sylvio; and the discovery of the existence of the twins being now made, she requested him to attend to the history of their births, and to give her his advice for bringing the offenders against their peace to justice.

The conte and contessa were little less eager to hear the detail of those events, which had led to the disguise of the fe-

male Sylvio's sex, and her brother's removal from his family, than was the newly-discovered Sylvio himself; and as the surgeon Sorato announced his patient still to be asleep, the present was judged a favourable time for the explanation from the lips of Bianca, which she gave in the following words:—

“ I am myself distantly related, by marriage, to the family Di Rosalva. The father of those whose story I am about to relate, was himself the last descendant of his house, the nearest relative which he could trace being a cousin, several degrees removed, whose estates lay in the Duchy of Parma.

“ A few weeks after the signor Di Rosalva had completed his twenty-seventh year, he married a very beautiful woman, with whom he promised himself every earthly happiness. She was an angel in disposition, and he loved her with the utmost tenderness. I was an eyewitness of their felicity, for my kind relative had, some time before his marriage, offered me his house as an asylum,

when I was left in circumstances of distress by the death of a profligate husband; and his wife kindly insisted that I should not quit it, because she was become its mistress.

“ For two years nothing occurred to be a momentary drawback upon their comforts or enjoyment. At the expiration of that time, the signor Sylvio began to grow impatient for an heir; he could not bear the idea of his name dying away, and his estates being transferred to persons who were to him utter strangers; and his prayers were constantly offered up to Heaven for a son.

“ His wife grew uneasy, because she saw her husband so; and the cloud of disappointment hung on both their brows, although their mutual affection was not diminished by the cause of their anxiety.

“ Nearly eight years passed without any ray of his favourite hope cheering the heart of the signor Sylvio. About this time the signora declared herself in a state of pregnancy, and the raptures of

her husband were only equalled by his attention to the health and happiness of the object to whom he was to owe the gratification of his most ardent wish.

“ The hours passed anxiously on between the extreme of joy, hope, and apprehension, till the moment arrived at which the signora Di Rosalva was to be released from her burthen.

“ When she was about three months advanced in her pregnancy, she had been alarmed by seeing a man in the streets of Genoa, from her carriage, who had been wounded in the wrist with a stiletto ; the circumstance had dwelt very forcibly on her mind, and some alarm was entertained lest this accident should have affected the perfectness of the child in her womb.

“ After a day of pain, the signora gave birth to a girl. I conveyed the intelligence to Di Rosalva, and easily discovered that the sex of the child cast a damp upon the pleasure which its birth gave him ; but there was a second piece of information reserved for me to convey

to him, of which I had not formed the slightest suspicion. On my return to the chamber of the signora, I found her agony by no means abated, and the surgeon who attended her said, she was as yet released from only half her burthen.

‘ Pray Heaven this second prove a boy!’ I exclaimed to myself, and my prayer was propitious, for in little more than a quarter of an hour, the second child was born a male. Never shall I forget how extravagant was the ecstasy of the signor Di Rosalva, when I bore him the tidings of his being become the father of a son; and equally imprinted on my memory is the sad reverse of feeling he experienced, when it became necessary to inform him that his beloved wife, in giving existence, had herself lost the bliss of life.

“ The dead we can only bewail, the living require the exertion of our active services in their cause; accordingly, while the thoughts of all the household of Di Rosalva were in the tomb with the lamented mother, the universal care

of all who were its members was directed to the rearing of her babes.

“ The twins were of remarkable beauty, even at the very period of their birth, when there is usually very little to be admired in infants, and so exactly alike, that some little difference in their dress alone rendered them distinguishable from each other; and on the wrist of the left arm of each was a scar, exactly on that part where their late mother had seen the man wounded in the street, and it was deemed providential that her children had incurred no greater calamity from her fright.

“ On the third day after their birth, they were baptized; the girl was called by her mother's name of Rosabella, and the boy was named Sylvio, after his father.

“ I had at this time, in some measure, the power of returning to my relative the benevolence which he had exercised towards me; for he believed his children only to be safe when under my immediate inspection, and I endeavoured to

repay to them the loss of their mother, by every tenderness and attention I had the means of bestowing on them; and, at such times as I left their nursery, I applied myself to prevent their father from sinking into that lethargy of grief, of which the effects are more to be dreaded than those of violent sorrow, and to which I saw him most inclined to become a prey. Di Rosalva had an insuperable aversion to the idea of his children sucking food from the breast of any woman but a parent; and as hers had been denied to them, by that regulator of human events whose ordinations are not to be questioned, he determined that they should be nourished by the milk of goats.

“ Upon this arrangement I took upon me the sole care of the twins, with the assistance only of a young woman who had attended on the late signora, and been a favourite with her, and whose parents were peasants in the neighbouring village, and tenants of Di Rosalva.

“ When my charges were rather more

than five weeks old, I was one day informed that there was a woman below in the hall, who desired to speak either with the signor Di Rosalva or myself. As I knew that the least exertion was painful to him, in his present state of affliction, I went down myself, and found, expecting me, a middle-aged woman, whose appearance denoted her to have been reduced from a state of some condition in life, to recent poverty. Her dress it was that so forcibly conveyed this idea, being composed of garments that had once been rich and ornamental, and which, in their present tattered and soiled state, were emblems of the most pitiable indigence.

‘Do I behold the signora Bianca?’ she said, as I approached her.

‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘Bianca is my name.’

‘Alas, signora,’ she returned, ‘my visit is a sorrowful one! I have walked hither from Genoa, to implore some little charity from the lady whom I still believed to be the mistress of this house, and my misery is now complete, in find-

ing her to be no more. Oh Heaven, what will become of me, wretch that I am !”

“ Her spirits and strength seemed equally exhausted ; the dust upon her shoes and stockings confirmed her having come on foot from Genoa ; and the compassion I felt for any object, thus sinking under fatigue of body, and affliction of mind, caused me to invite her to take a seat, and to order some refreshment to be set before her.

“ When I had given her a glass of wine and water, she appeared in some degree refreshed, and said, ‘ It is impossible, signora, to express the wretchedness of my situation ; complicated misfortunes have driven me out of the house which the excellent signora Di Rosalva had, in her humanity, provided for me. I am cast a beggar upon the world, and in this painful dilemma I have directed my steps towards her mansion, that I might, in person, explain to her the calamities I am suffering under, and I now find her dead,—no longer able to offer her conso-

lation or support to an unhappy woman, who has so long existed on her bounty alone.'

'If this is the case,' replied I, 'if you are one whom the deceased signora thought worthy of her countenance, there is no doubt but that, from affection for her memory, not less than a reverence for the dictates of humanity, the signor Di Rosalva will afford you some relief.'

'He must, I think, know who I am,' she replied; 'I am, wretched and humble as I now appear before you, a distant relative of his angel wife. Tell him, I entreat you, signora, that the unfortunate Maria Calotti begs to fall at his feet.'

"I undertook, without hesitation, to carry her message to Di Rosalva.—'Poor woman!' he exclaimed on receiving it, 'although I have myself never seen her, I know her well, from the report of my beloved, my departed wife, to be an object of pity and charity; she has seen better days; she has two unhappy sons, who are the causes of constant affliction

to her; but it must be some excessive calamity, I think, which brings her hither, and on foot. Tell her I will come to her immediately.'

"When I returned with the signor's answer, she expressed great joy, and began to inform me that one of the sons whom he had mentioned to me, was just returned from sea, and had, with a most abandoned courtezan, who was attached to him, driven her out of her house, and seized upon what little property she had been possessed of, to supply themselves with the indulgence of all kinds of extravagant pleasures.

"When the signor Di Rosalva came to her, she recounted to him, with a fresh flood of tears, her accumulated misfortunes, and said that she had walked hither from Genoa, in order to entreat the only relative of whom she was now possessed, with the exception of her unnatural sons, to afford her the means of a present subsistence, and to gain her redress for the injustice practising against her.

“ Di Rosalva assured her, that one like herself, who had not only been accustomed to find a friend of the most liberal kind in his deceased wife, but who was also her relative, should never sue in vain to him; and he invited her to remain a few days in his house, during which time, he said, he would write upon the subject to a friend of his in the law at Genoa, and desire such steps as her case required, to be pursued in her favour.

“ For this kind assurance, on the part of Di Rosalva, she expressed most unbounded gratitude; and would have burst into a string of united encomiums on the virtues of the deceased signora, and lamentations at her untimely loss, had not I, by a look which I gave her, restrained her from proceeding on a subject so heart-rending to the senses of the signor Sylvio. In his presence, accordingly, she forbore to speak of her; but no sooner were we left alone, than she began to inquire of me all the particulars

of her death, and to pour forth praises to her memory.

“ I gratified her in answers to such questions as she advanced; and, in my turn, asked of her how she had become acquainted with the death of her benefactress, as, from her own account, she had been ignorant of it when she had set out from Genoa?

‘ I learned it,’ she said, ‘ of a peasant whom I joined on the road, near the avenue leading to this house, and who informed me that it was the palazzo of the signor Di Rosalva. The good man came with me all the way to the house. He said he had a daughter, a servant here, and that her mother, being very ill, he was come to fetch her home for a short time, to see her, as he believed her to be lying on her deathbed.’

‘ Indeed!’ cried I; ‘ there is no other servant in this house whose father is a peasant in this neighbourhood, except a young woman who relieves me from the more laborious part of the attendance which the dear babes of our deceased

friend require. You must excuse my leaving you for a while; I must go and inquire whether she wants to be absent for any time from her duty.'

'Permit me,' said my new acquaintance, 'to go with you: next to the gratification I should have reaped from beholding my lost relative, will be that of contemplating her innocent babes. Pray let me go with you.'

"I readily consented, and we went together into the nursery, where I found Lauretta impatiently waiting my coming, to request that she might be permitted to go and see her dying mother. — 'Theresa or Antonia,' she said, 'would readily take her place for a night.'

'You cannot,' said Maria Calotti, 'confer a greater happiness on me, than to suffer me to be the substitute of this young woman for the night of her absence; I shall experience such pleasure as I have long been a stranger to, in watching over, and attending to the wants of the children of one for whom I

have ever felt the affection I did for the signora Di Rosalva, and to whose family I owe every service of which I am capable.'

"I had some hesitation in accepting her offer; but she urged it so strongly, that I deemed I should not only be acting wrongly myself, but offend her, by refusing to accept it. I accordingly yielded to her entreaties, and Lauretta directly set off to visit her mother, with permission to remain out until the next day at noon.

CHAP. VII.

"IN the evening, as we sat together, Maria said, she hoped that on the following day she should be permitted to visit the spot where her deceased relative had been buried, that she might, by the side of her tomb, offer up her prayers for the soul of one whose existence had been so great a comfort to her. I told

her that she lay interred in the Church of Saint Francis, hard by, and that I would find her a proper conductor to it in the morning.

“The children slept in adjoining apartments, in each of which there was a bed, besides those in which they slept, one for me and one for Laretta. As I had not for an instant been able to leave my charges in her absence, Maria and I had sat together in one of the chambers. When we were about to retire to bed—
 ‘They are excellently quiet children,’ I said to my companion, ‘and scarcely ever awake between the last time of my feeding them before I go to bed, and the hour of six or seven in the morning.’

‘And yet, I warrant me,’ returned Maria Calotti, ‘that anxious as you must naturally be about the welfare of the important charge you have so humanely taken upon you, you wake at least a dozen times every night, whether they do or not.’

‘No, I do not,’ I replied; ‘I very seldom wake, except they cry; but the

least noise on the part of either of them rouses me instantly.'

'Except I am indebted to the length of my walk to-day for sleep,' she rejoined, 'I dare say I shall not enjoy much of its refreshment; for I am at all times a very bad sleeper, especially in a strange bed. At night, too, my afflictions all pour into my thoughts, and keep me awake; and when I have not them immediately to distress me, I am subject to violent pains, which often oblige me to leave my bed, and wander about my chamber for hours together.'

"I desired her to make no scruple of calling to me, if she should want any thing before morning that I could supply her with. She answered that she should not do that, and begged, if she was restless, it might not disturb me, as she was quite unaccustomed to have any one near her during the hours devoted to sleep; and upon this we bade each other good night.

"Between five and six in the morning I awoke with the cry of the infant

whose little bed was placed by the side of mine. I arose, and taking her in my arms, for it was Rosabella, I went to get her some milk. In my way to the closet where it stood, I was obliged to pass the bed of my new acquaintance. I perceived that she had left it, and was not in the room. I looked into the bed of the infant Sylvio, and, to my utter astonishment, found that he was gone also.

“For a few moments I knew not what to believe; I thought that Maria must have risen, and taken the child with her into the garden. I ran to the window, in the hope of seeing her from it. A thick rain, which was falling, convinced me this could not be the case; and I now first supposed that the child had been carried off by design.

“Conscious of nothing but the loss of the child, I ran wildly into the chamber of Di Rosalva, and bursting into tears as I spoke, informed him of the discovery I had made.

“It must be unnecessary to describe

the agony of an affectionate parent listening to the information I was doomed to convey to him. He sprang frantically from his bed, and throwing around him his night-gown, he ran into the gallery, calling aloud upon his servants to arise, and go in pursuit of his child, who had been stolen.

“In a few minutes most of the family were gathered round him. The agitation of his mind rendered his commands unintelligible, and I was obliged to explain for him to the domestics, the disappearance of the child, and of Maria Calotti, whom I could not but suppose to have taken it away.

“Every male servant was directly sent out in pursuit of Maria and the child; and these were ordered to communicate the intelligence to the peasantry on the estate, and engage their services likewise in the search.

‘Bianca,’ said Di Rosalva, addressing me, ‘you now hold to your breast my only hope: grant me the single consolation my present affliction admits of;

‘promise me, that, for the present at least, it shall not pass from your arms to those of any other individual.’

‘It shall not, it shall not,’ I replied; ‘whatever is in my power, you know you have only to command.’

“The intelligence was quickly spread abroad; and the gentlemen whose estates were contiguous to that of Di Rosalva, came almost immediately to him, and made an offer of their services in his present distress. He related to them the story of Maria’s arrival, as composedly as he was able, and of her subsequent disappearance with the child.

‘Have you not sent to Genoa,’ asked one of the gentlemen, ‘to learn whether she is returned to her own house, and to have her detained by the hands of justice, if she has?’

“This had, in the confusion, been omitted; and the same gentleman who had advanced the question, kindly set off for the city in person for the purpose.

“None of the servants or peasantry could gain the slightest information on

the desired point; not one individual they had met with had seen either the woman or child; every habitation for leagues around had been searched, but without success. At length the gentleman returned from Genoa, and the information he brought opened our eyes to the atrocity of the affair. He had inquired for the house of Maria Calotti, and on reaching it, had learned from a friend who had resided with her, that she had for three days past been a corpse.

"It was now plain that some wretch had assumed her name, in order to procure herself an introduction into the house of Di Rosalva, for the infamous purpose of stealing one of his children."

"And this infamous wretch, I trust," said the conte, interrupting Bianca, "was no other than that Rodovina Maritos, whom you so unexpectedly met yesterday in her way to prison."

"Yes, yes, the same, the same," exclaimed the signora Bianca. "Heaven be praised that I have at length found her!"

"This explains her conduct towards me," said Sylvio.

"Towards you, my dear Sylvio!" exclaimed Bianca; "do you then know her?"

"But too well," answered Sylvio; "but indulge us by concluding your narrative, and I will then give you mine in all its particulars."

Bianca complied, and proceeded thus:

"The agonies of Di Rosalva's mind, it may be easily imagined, were such as to render him entirely unfit for the task of deciding what steps were proper to be taken for the recovery of his infant. His friends kindly took upon them the office; they promised with the morning to visit the Doge, and ask his advice upon the conduct which it was becoming to pursue in this unparalleled perplexity.

"It was late in the evening when the friends of Di Rosalva quitted his villa to prepare themselves for the business of the succeeding day, and left its unhappy possessor alone with me. We sat for a considerable time in silence. His burn-

ing head rested on my shoulder, and one of the hands of his remaining infant was held in his

“ At last, starting up, he spoke with a wildness that alarmed me ; he exclaimed—‘ Great God ! Bianca, that I should not yet have inquired which of my children it is that remains to me !’

‘ It is your Rosabella,’ I replied.

‘ And is it then my Sylvio, my boy, my dear boy, who is torn from me ?’ he cried. ‘ Oh, Heaven ! be merciful, and restore him to the arms of his distracted father !’

“ Another silence ensued, which he again broke.—‘ I must go to bed, Bianca,’ he said ; ‘ I am too ill to sit up.’—He took the child in his arms, and fervently kissing it, he added—‘ How blessed is thy state, to be unconscious of the pangs which rend thy father’s heart ! Selfish is my prayer, when I desire thy preservation, for thou art now my only blessing, and, without thee, the world would be a void.’ As he returned her to my arms, he addressed me—‘ Remember,

you have promised to trust her with no one but yourself, Bianca,' he said.

'I will instantly retire with her to our apartment,' I replied; 'no one shall even accompany me to it.'

'Bear with me, I entreat you,' he said, 'for I am almost mad, and account you alone fit to be trusted in this world of treachery and crimes.'

"I would have entreated him to endeavour to tranquillize his mind, but I considered how unfeeling would appear these admonitions, which it requires a stoical apathy to follow; I therefore parted from him in silence, and locked myself within my chamber, with the infant Rosabella.

"I now, for the first time, gave vent to my own feelings. During the day I had imposed on myself the restraint of controlling them as much as lay in my power, in order that my tears might not still more unstring the nerves of the unhappy Di Rosalva: in the solitude of my chamber they flowed freely; while the innocent cherub, to whom all my



attentions were directed, lay smiling in the placid lap of sleep, unconscious that an only brother had been so mysteriously snatched from her.

“ About two in the morning, as I was first sinking into a disturbed sleep, I heard some one rap with their knuckles upon the door of my chamber, and at the same moment a voice without repeated—‘ Bianca! Bianca!’

‘ Who is there?’ I asked, rising up in my bed.

‘ It is I—it is Di Rosalva,’ replied the voice, which I immediately recognised to be his. ‘ Pray admit me into your chamber; I have something of the most immediate consequence to communicate to you.’

“ I hurried on my clothes, and opened the door to him. He came in, and shutting it again after him, he said—‘ Let me sit down, and endeavour to collect myself for conversation; I have a great deal of important matter floating in my brain, that I wish to commune with you upon.’

“For a few moments I was not thoroughly convinced that affliction had not given a temporary incoherence to his mind, and I placed myself in a chair by his side, while I kept my eyes employed in watching his countenance, of which the expression very soon convinced me that my apprehensions had been groundless.

‘I do not recollect,’ he said, ‘that you left me yesterday for a moment, after the time that my poor boy was taken from us.’

‘No, I did not,’ I answered.

‘Nor did you, I think,’ he went on, ‘give Rosabella from your arms, even for an instant, into the arms of any other person?’

‘You desired I would not,’ I replied, ‘and I felt a pleasure in obeying you.’

‘I was the first person to whom you mentioned the disappearance of my beloved Sylvio—was I not?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ was my reply. ‘I came immediately to your chamber, on making the discovery which now afflicts us.’

‘Do you not then, my dear friend,’ he rejoined, ‘think it probable that, all these points considered, no one but ourselves is acquainted which of the two babes it is that is taken from us?’

‘I should suppose so, indeed,’ I returned; ‘for I perfectly recollect that you only told your servants and friends, that one of your children had been stolen, and did not say which. The confusion occasioned in the house by the event, I imagine, prevented inquiries from being made on the subject; for none were advanced relative to the sex of that which was spared us.’

‘And as Rosabella was in her night-dress the whole of yesterday, she wore nothing upon her to distinguish her sex by?’ he continued.

‘No, she did not,’ I answered; ‘but why such earnestness relative to this circumstance?’

‘Because, with your assistance,’ returned Di Rosalva, ‘I intend so to use it, that, if it does not lead to the recovery of my boy, it shall, at least, foil the

views of those who have stolen him. The recovery of my boy! did I say?— Oh, Bianca, I dare not flatter myself with a hope of his recovery! he has been taken hence—never to return; and I must derive the only consolation his murder, for such I know it is, can afford me, from the consciousness that his innocence must send him, an angel, to the bosom of his sainted mother.’

“ The tears, for some moments, interrupted his utterance; when again capable of articulating, he proceeded thus:—

‘ To you, who have been almost the constant companion of my life, it must be unnecessary to repeat the anxiety that preyed upon my mind during the first years of my marriage, while my beloved wife gave me no promise of an heir. You have also, I think, heard me repeat, that, should I not be blessed with a son, my estate, in which consists nearly all my wealth, must descend to my next male heir, and that this relative is a cousin several times removed: I have scarcely

ever seen him—but, from an unerring report of him, I know him to be a man of an evil disposition, who has, for many years past, been desiring my death, in order to become the possessor of my property. Assist me then, my dear friend,' he added, in the most persuasive tone of entreaty, 'assist me to bring up my Rosabella, in the eye of the world, as the male descendant of my house. As we alone, and those who have stolen from me my boy, are acquainted which of my children is now remaining to me, those who have done me this wrong cannot bring proof of the feminine sex of my present heir, without declaring themselves the perpetrators of a crime, for which the law of justice would award them the severest punishments; and if this plan does not restore to me my Sylvio, and lay open to me a knowledge of my enemies, it will, at least, have the good effect of preserving to my daughter that inheritance of which it has been their aim to deprive her.'

" I perfectly comprehended his feel-

ings upon the subject, and I was not surprised that the unparalleled calamity which had fallen upon him should impel him to strange methods of redressing, as far as lay in his power, the evil which had been intended to his family; but I could not, at the same time, avoid foreseeing the many unpleasant situations in which a disguise of sex would place the unhappy being condemned to practise a deception which would, probably, end only with her life—and I told him, that, in my opinion, the price of her inheritance would be too dearly paid by the many unavoidable straits that the terms upon which she enjoyed it would force her into—and that, I conceived, it would be infinitely more for her happiness and his own, to suffer the event of his misfortune to weave itself out in its natural course.

“ He undoubtedly heard my arguments, but they produced no change in his sentiments: his idea had been taken up with a kind of frantic resoluteness, which he deemed it cruel and unfeeling

towards him, in me, to dispute; and I was constrained to become the instrument of Rosabella's sex being disguised to the world; for which purpose the clothes of her lost brother were, on the following morning, put upon her, and she was, from that time, addressed only as Sylvio."

"Unfortunate sister!" exclaimed Sylvio, "how much greater have been thy torments in inheritance, than mine in the privation which I have experienced of my rights!"

"Great, indeed, have been the sufferings and conflicts of her mind," replied Bianca.

"I shall not at this moment," she continued, "enter into a minute detail of the various feelings which have rent her innocent heart, but merely speak of such matters as tend to the elucidation of other circumstances, which it is now becoming that all here present should be made acquainted with."

CHAP. VIII.

AFTER a short pause, Bianca proceeded thus:—"Every inquiry after the pretended Maria Calotti, and the lost Sylvio, proved in vain. For a time Di Rosalva was inconsolable, and I had very great apprehensions of his life, so strongly were the marks of heart-corroding grief stamped on his features; but time, the most efficacious of medicines in the diseases of the mind, gradually produced a change in him—and, as Rosabella grew up, his thoughts turned from the child whom he had lost, to the one which still remained to bless him.

"Arduous was, at this time, the task which my affection both for the father and the child imposed on me, of concealing the sex of the heir of Di Rosalva—a task of a much more difficult nature during the extreme youth of Rosabella,

than I found it when she was become capable of comprehending those admonitions which were daily poured into her ear by her father and myself.

“ Thus passed on eight years ; Di Rosalva satisfied with the conduct he had pursued for preserving to his descendant that inheritance, of which a selfish enemy would have deprived his family ; but still dreading that the step he had taken might have caused his enemies to revenge themselves upon him, for the subtilty he had practised towards them, by the murder of his child.

“ The thought was horrid ; but it was now too late to retract the action which might have been the cause of it, and he endeavoured to drive it from his mind.

“ When Rosabella was on the point of completing her ninth year, Di Rosalva, who had for some time past been extremely unwell, conceived a presentiment that the hour of his death was not far distant.

“ One evening, which succeeded an unusual gloomy day, and which had been

rendered still more melancholy by the disquietude of mind and lowness of spirits, which the reflections of Di Rosalva, added to his ill health, had brought upon him, he called to him Rosabella, and having for some time caressed her on his knee, during which time he had more fully explained to her, than he had ever done before, the loss of her brother, and the cause for which she had been bred to the outward assumption of his sex—he took her in his arms, and moving with her along a gallery in his mansion, requested me to follow him.

“ The child had listened to her father’s account of her brother’s disappearance with a wicked woman, who, he told her, he feared had been employed to steal him by some vile man, who intended to kill him as soon as they had got him into their power, till her little heart, which had, for the first time, been swelled with a sense of sorrow not her own, had relieved itself in tears, with which her face was still wet, when Di Rosalva carried her into an apartment

at the extremity of the gallery, which was seldom in use.

“ It was a room dedicated to the purpose of evening entertainments : the furniture was antique and heavy—the walls were covered with a dark-coloured silk, with which the furniture corresponded—and the only relief throughout the gloomy sameness of the whole, were large mirrors, which, at the present moment, appeared placed there solely to repeat the gloomy scene in various points of view. Di Rosalva opened the shutter of only one of the windows ; its aspect was western, and it admitted those faint and watery rays of a departing sun, which do not unusually burst from the clouds for a few moments before it retires from the world after a day of rain ; they fell immediately on a picture of large dimensions, which I found had been lately, and unknown to me, introduced into the apartment. To this Di Rosalva directed the attention of his daughter.

“ The scenery of the piece was a wild

and rugged cave, through a chasm, in the rocky substance of which, darted one ray of light, which seemed to render the surrounding gloom more awful; and this ray fell on the countenance of a beautiful girl about the age of Rosabella herself, who was seen upon her knees, in the midst of a group of men, with countenances descriptive of every cruelty, the most savage of whom was on the point of thrusting his sword into her breast.

“What think you of that picture, Rosabella?” asked her father.

‘Horrid! dreadful!’ she exclaimed.

‘How should you feel,’ he rejoined, ‘if you were in place of that unfortunate child?’

“A faint ‘oh!’ escaped Rosabella’s lips, and she clung to me, shuddering at the idea.

‘I have caused this picture to be fixed here,’ Di Rosalva continued to say, ‘that by contemplating its horrors, you may learn to avoid being placed in a situation of equal misery with the child whom

you there behold; regard this as a picture of your own fate, should you ever divulge the secret of your sex.'

'Fear me not—indeed, indeed, I never will,' replied Rosabella.

'It is for your own sake I caution you, my dear child,' returned her father; 'let not one rash moment of your life explain to your enemies a secret which I have, for so many years, succeeded in preserving sacred from all the world; should they discover it, doubt not that their vengeance will be to you more cruel than the swords of these assassins whom you are now contemplating. Should you, therefore, ever feel your heart inclining you to betray the secret on which your happiness depends, visit this apartment, contemplate this picture, and impose silence on your lips; and if, when absent from this spot, you should ever feel the disclosure of your sex rising to your tongue, check the impulse, by concluding that an assassin, armed for your destruction, hovers near you at the moment.'

“ A silence of some minutes ensued. When Di Rosalva believed her sufficiently impressed with the horror of the subject she had been contemplating, he said—‘ We will now quit this object ; but fail not, Rosabella, to remember the purpose for which it is placed here.’

“ The sound of his voice aroused her from a trance of thought, into which the subject had thrown her ; she turned hastily round, and the reflection of the picture, in one of the large mirrors, met her eyes ; she started at the sight, and, exclaiming—‘ Oh, mercy—there again ! —I shall never forget it!’ ran out of the room.

“ After we had been a short time returned to the apartment where we usually sat, she addressed her father, by saying—‘ Tell me—pray tell me—do you know my enemies ?’

‘ By name only, my love,’ he replied.

‘ Tell me their name, then,’ rejoined she, ‘ that I may always avoid them.’

‘ They are called,’ he answered, ‘ Della Piacca.’

‘ Then from all who bear the name of Della Piacca,’ said Rosabella, ‘ I will ever fly, to keep myself safe from such horrid assassins as are represented in the picture.’

“ Della Piacca ! said you ? ” exclaimed the conte Lorenzo, interrupting Bianca in her narrative.

“ Yes, signor—yes, Della Piacca,” replied Bianca, “ the same from whom you inherit your title and your name ; but suffer me to proceed to the sequel of my explanation.—Di Rosalva’s presentiment of his death was a just one : in the course of three months he paid the debt of nature ; his last breath was emitted in prayers for the preservation of his daughter, and the restoration of his son to happiness, if his existence were still granted him. From this time Rosabella and myself continued to reside at the villa, with very few acquaintances, and without any intimate friends, till she, by accident, gained a knowledge of the family Del Alvaretti. To this ami-

able lady," pointing to the contessa Averilla as she spoke, "it is needless for me to repeat; how soon a friendship was contracted between them; I have only to add, that it was a friendship which formed the greatest happiness of my unfortunate Rosabella's life."

"But recollect that neither my husband nor the signor Sylvio have heard the particulars which ensued from our introduction to each other, although they are known to us," remarked Averilla.

"Will you, my good lady," said Bianca, hesitatingly, and casting a look of meaning at the contessa as she spoke, "here take up the thread of my narrative for me?"

Averilla understood the delicacy of Bianca's idea, and said—"It is immaterial which of us relates it. The conte is already acquainted that Rosabella imposed herself on me, with so great success, for one of the sex whose habiliments she wore, that——"

"The signor Sylvio cannot want any farther explanation of your error," in-

interrupted the conte, smiling; "and I cannot be sufficiently thankful to my propitious stars, that it was the *sister*, and not the *brother*, who was the object of my Averilla's first love."

The signor Sylvio heard these confessions, with a countenance that bespoke him fully to comprehend the nature of past occurrences, but forbore to offer a single remark upon them, which might create the contessa a momentary feeling the reverse of satisfaction.

"You cannot now want, I think, contessa, to be told," said Bianca, addressing Averilla, "that at the moment you believed Rosabella to be on the point of making you a confession of a passion for you in the garden del Alvarretti, you had so far won upon her feelings and her heart, that she had come to the resolution of imparting to you the secret of her sex, and that she was withheld from it by casting her eyes at the instant upon the statue of the Gladiator, which so strongly brought to her mind the words of her father, when

he shewed her the picture—‘ If you should ever,’ he had said, ‘ feel the disclosure of your sex rising to your tongue, check the impulse by concluding, that an assassin, armed for your destruction, hovers near you at the moment.’ And you cannot be surprised that a female, placed in the unparalleled situation she was, should have been affected by a circumstance at which any other individual would have been unmoved.

“ It is impossible for me to describe,” continued the venerable Bianca, “ what were the emotions of Rosabella, when the unexpected visit of Felix, which you cannot but remember, to the villa di Rosalva, informed her that your uncle Rossano had selected for you a husband, and first explained to her that you had regarded her friendship for you to be of a different nature to what it really was. The discovery communicated to her heart the keenest anxiety ; she dreaded lest your still supposing her to be a male should withhold you

from an alliance with a man calculated to ensure your future felicity ; and she now feared to make the confession of her sex to you, lest you should entrust it to your husband, and it should, through his inadvertency, fly into the world. In this perplexity of mind she determined to meet you in the church of St. Francis, at the hour of your attending mass, and, having requested your attention to a matter of importance which she should tell you she had to communicate to you, to disclose the secret of her life, and implore you to bind yourself, by a vow at the altar of your tutelar saint, not to repeat her confession to any individual being. She judged the avowal of her sex now to be necessary to your happiness, and therefore, even with a degree of hazard to her own safety, she resolved, from her high esteem for you, that no consideration should deter her from the disclosure ; and the event has justified her opinion of you—she has found you a

friend worthy of the most unlimited confidence."

"But why," said Averilla, "on the very day that I had pronounced this vow of secrecy, and immediately after my procuring her a reconciliation with the signora Felicia and her son, did Rosabella, secretly as it were, leave the palazzo del Alvaretti, without bidding farewell to any one of us—and on what account, I may also ask, did yourself and she so suddenly quit the villa di Rosalva?"

"When you and your aunt," returned Bianca, "had that morning quitted the apartment, and left her alone with Felix, she, for the first time, heard from his lips the name of your intended husband. The sound of Della Piacca struck terror to her heart: breathless, she instantly returned home, and, seeking me, declared to me her intention of flying to some distant part of the country; and I confess, that knowing such to be the name of her enemies, I felt no small de-

gree of anxiety myself, to remove to some distance from our present abode. We accordingly left the villa di Rosalva that very evening, and have ever since been wandering over various parts of Italy."

"You then, doubtless, supposed me the old conte Roderigo, who has been dead many years," said Della Piacca, "and whom I myself never saw—nor did I know that I was the heir to his title, till I received information of it through the channel of the law?"

"Even so," replied Bianca; "he was the most dissolute of men, and aimed at the life of this youth," casting her eyes towards Sylvio, "that he might secure an inheritance to a son, equally profligate as his father, and whom I have, a few days since, learned to be dead as well as himself; at which time I also became acquainted, that his name and title had descended to a very distant branch of his family."

"You came to Turin the day before the last—did you not?" said the conte;

"I met you on the road, at the distance of about a couple of leagues from the city."

"Yes, we did," returned Bianca.

"And you and Rosabella have also been in this city once before, since the time of your quitting the villa di Rosalva—have you not?" asked Averilla.

Bianca fully comprehended that, in this question, Averilla referred to the letter which she had received, dated from the hotel of the Holy Virgin, during the time of her confinement to her chamber, and replied—"It is very true, contessa; but I cannot speak of that visit to Turin; Rosabella must herself inform you of our motive for that. Pardon me; but I do not feel myself at liberty to disclose *one secret* which still labours in her breast."

"To this secret," she continued, "was owing our arrival in this place on the evening before the last. My meeting with Rodovina Maritos, as I now find the wretched woman who imposed herself upon me and the late signor Di Ro-

salva, for Maria Calotti, to be named, you are already acquainted with. Rosabella's sole reason for coming hither, had been to seek an interview with the contessa: throughout the whole of the day my rencontre with this woman, and its consequences, had detained her from putting her design into execution. In the evening she set out from our hotel for that purpose; and as her enemy, the late conte Della Piacca is now no more, I cannot guess on what account the poniard of any assassin can have been aimed at her innocent breast."

"Was it not, perhaps," said Sylvio, "rather intended to have pierced my heart, than that of my unfortunate sister; and that the resemblance we bear to each other, of the strength of which the errors that it has led the most intimate friends of us both into, is an undeniable proof, may have deceived those who were employed upon my destruction?"

"Have you then enemies, whom you

suspect of this treachery towards you?" asked Bianca, anxiously.

"That Rodovina Maritos," replied Sylvio, "who stole me from the protection of my parent, is accused of the murder of a merchant, named Eldorado, lately dead in this city. In her examination yesterday, before the court of justice, she charged the accusation brought against herself upon me, and mentioned one Michael Vivane, as a witness that I had committed the crime. I had, accordingly, last night information brought me, that I must appear to-day in the court at a certain hour, to confront this Michael Vivane. About three hours ago, fresh intelligence was brought me, that Michael Vivane was not to be found; and that the process, of course, must be delayed till he could be made to appear. Does it not, from these circumstances, strike you as probable that no such person as Michael Vivane exists? that she mentioned him as a witness of the crime, which she knows not to have been perpetrated by me, merely to gain herself

time? and that she has used that time in employing some of her vile accomplices to take away my life, in the hope that my death would free her from the charge of Eldorado's murder, and equally spare her a confession of such knowledge as it has already appeared evident that she is possessed of concerning my fate?"

The conte Lorenzo immediately replied, that he judged Sylvio's conclusions to be drawn with much appearance of their being just.—“I will, without delay,” added he, “set on foot an experiment, by which we shall, in a very short time, discover whether those villains, who last night attacked your sister, were the accomplices of the infamous Rodovina. If they are such, nothing but the temptation of reward could have linked them to her service; a stronger temptation will as quickly convert them into her enemies. I shall therefore instantly publish the reward of one thousand zechins for the apprehension of either of the two ruffians who last night pursued your sister up the steps of my palazzo.”

Sylvio was beginning to pour forth the gratitude of his heart to the conte, for the interest he manifested in the happiness of himself and his sister; but the conte stopped him, by saying—"Not another word, or I must call in Flavia, to convince you how much I am still your debtor. I shall go immediately, and take the proper steps for putting my design into execution. In the mean while, do you compose yourself to meet your sister, and use a few minutes of the intermediate time to convince Flavia that you are the same human being to whom she owes the preservation of her life;" and with these words the conte departed, to execute the purpose of which his mind was now full.

CHAP. IX.

It must easily be imagined how many interesting subjects Bianca and Sylvio had to discuss, and with what avidity

they seized the first moment that offered itself to their acceptance for that purpose. But the privilege of conversing together was not long allowed them after the departure of the conte; for Sorato entering the apartment, informed them that Rosabella was awake, much refreshed and amended by the sleep she had enjoyed, and anxiously inquiring for the contessa.

Averilla immediately replied to the summons by rising to leave the apartment, and the signora Bianca rose to follow her, saying—"I am sure she will be the happier for seeing me; I cannot, therefore, delay to visit her; and you, my dear Sylvio, shall soon be introduced to the sister whom you have never known. I shall have no apprehension in shortly disclosing to her the happy intelligence of your being restored to us; it will relieve her mind of a weight of anxiety, that must accelerate the return of her health and strength."

When left alone in the apartment, Sylvio's mind rested upon the events of his infancy, which had just been made

known to him, and as he dwelt on the destruction which had, at that early period of life, threatened him, and compared it with the felicity for which the beneficent hand of Providence had reserved him, the mingled sensations of his soul drew the tears into his eyes, and as he wiped them from his face, he exclaimed—" Oh, my dear father! that thou wert still alive, to witness the happiness of thy children! My mother, too, would thou hadst also been spared to bless us with thy presence!"

As he uttered these words, he felt a hand placed upon that which he was holding before his eyes, that drew it gently from his face, and on turning round his head, he observed that it was Flavia, who now held his hand in both hers.—" Don't cry, signor Sylvio," she said, in a tone of voice that bespoke her scarcely able to restrain her own tears, " don't cry because you have no mamma alive; my poor mamma has been dead a long while too; but I don't feel the loss of her now, the dear contessa makes

me so excellent a second mother; and I am sure she will be equally kind to you, and make you a second mother too, for she told me long ago she pitied you, and she pitied me at first, and very soon after she loved me, and so she will you, depend upon it."

When the heart is swelled to a certain pitch of tender feeling, one added particle of sympathy, poured into the vein of joy, causes it to overflow. The tears which had before started singly into the eyes of Sylvio, now burst, united, from his heart, and he clasped the little Flavia to his breast, with feelings of unutterable love and gratitude.

Flavia, who had not been perfectly convinced, till within a few moments before the conte left the room, that Sylvio was not the ghost which the servants had supposed him, and still unable to suppress her curiosity to learn whether he was of this world or not, had been standing behind a silk curtain, which, in the summer months, was the substitute of a door that opened from this apart-

ment into the garden. From this covert she had heard the whole of Sylvio's story, and being rather ashamed of confessing herself a listener, she intended to have left the place of her concealment, without entering the apartment, by the way she had reached it; but Sylvio's address to his deceased parents had struck so forcibly to her heart, that she could not resist the desire she felt of offering him consolation.

Whilst Sylvio still held Flavia in his arms, the conte, returned from the city, entered the apartment. Flavia ran to him, and exclaimed—"Papa, won't you be the signor Sylvio's father, and allow my second mamma to be his mamma too? Do say you will: you once told me it was my duty to confer the greatest happiness in my power on him, as the preserver of my life; and I am sure, if I judge of him by myself, he cannot be more happy than in being allowed to have the same excellent parents that I am blessed with."

The conte uttered an affirmative from

his heart to the request of Flavia ; and the present moment cemented, by the most sensitive ties, a friendship commenced under the most interesting of circumstances.

In the afternoon, Rosabella was so much restored, by the joint efforts of Sorato's care, and the nursing of the contessa, as to be able to leave her bed ; and as the first subject upon which she attempted to address her friend Averilla and the signora Bianca, was to explain to them the uneasiness which she had experienced from a knowledge of the discovery of her sex having been made to Sorato and the conte Della Piacca, Bianca judged that she could not act more wisely, in the case of her niece, than gradually to reveal to her, that the necessity of her appearing in a male habit had ceased.

The task is sometimes difficult, to communicate an event of excessive joy, in such a manner that it may not produce on the hearer an effect of an opposite nature ; but Bianca so adroitly con-

ducted the discovery of Sylvio's being restored to his family, that Rosabella suffered as slightly as possible from the unexpected intelligence.

But those feelings which had been controlled, while his idea alone was present to her mind, she could no longer repress when he stood before her. With a wild shriek, she attempted to spring into his arms, but sunk back upon her chair, overpowered with the exertion; while Sylvio stood, utterly unable to afford her assistance; every sense was deprived of its power, save his eyes, and they fastened themselves upon his sister, with a gaze of astonishment which bespoke him almost incredulous, that it was not the reflection of himself upon which they were fixed.

At length the charm, which held the senses of each in subjection, died away. Rosabella revived to an easy composure of mind; and the surprise of Sylvio yielded to the joy he experienced at folding a long-lost sister to his heart: it was a moment of transport that exceeded

any emotion which they had hitherto felt.

In the course of the evening it was explained to Rosabella, that the poniard from which she had been a sufferer, had doubtless been aimed at the breast of her brother, the leading events of whose history were, in as few words as possible, made known to her, with a promise that the particulars of his life should be recited to her on the morrow, after a night of rest should have better enabled her to give her attention to them.

The wound which Rosabella had received was not very deep; it was from loss of blood that she had most materially suffered; thus weakness was at the present moment her chief cause of indisposition.

To her brother's questions, of when she had first been assailed by the braves, and whether she thought she should know either of them again? she replied, that at some distance from the palazzo della Piacca, she had on the preceding evening seen two men in masks, whom she had remarked to be observ-

ing her, but of whom she had entertained no dread, till they had pursued her up the steps of the colonnade; and that, although their countenances had been concealed from her by their masks, still there was something so striking in the figure of him who had given her the blow, that she thought she could not fail to recognise him, should she ever again behold him.

The conte informed her of the reward he had published for their apprehension; and with a fervent wish from the lips of all, that the succeeding day might throw some elucidation upon the past mystery, they left the chamber of Rosabella.

The conte remarked, that till the enemies of Sylvio were detected and brought to justice, it would not be safe for him to appear in the streets by night, and therefore insisted on his taking a bed at the palazzo. The signora Bianca he also entreated to consider it as her home for the present; and the happy circle assembled beneath its roof, in a recapitu-

lation of past events, heightened the enjoyment of the present hour.

CHAP. X.

ABOUT the fall of twilight, on the following evening, the conte Lorenzo was informed that there was a man at the gate of the palazzo, requesting to be admitted to his presence. Not doubting that the person was one of the confederates in the villany to which Rosabella had so nearly fallen a sacrifice, he imparted his suspicion to Sylvio, and they retired to a private apartment, into which they ordered the man to be brought to them.

In a few minutes he appeared. He was tall and handsome; in age, he seemed at most twenty-seven years; his countenance was expressive of contending despair and satisfaction; and his dress such as bespoke him necessitous;

without being the garb of one in a very inferior situation of life.

“Do I,” he said, in a faltering, but still impressive tone of voice, “do I, in either of these signors, behold the conte Della Piacca?”

“This is the conte,” said Sylvio.

As Sylvio spoke, the stranger, for the first time, turned upon him his eyes, which had before been directed towards Della Piacca; he started, and exclaimed—“Thank God! thank God!”

Sylvio hastily demanded an explanation of his emotion.

“I thank God,” replied the stranger, “that you are unhurt, that the poniard which was the evening before the last directed at your heart, missed its aim!”

The conte comprehended that Sylvio was still mistaken for his sister, and said—“Are you then acquainted who it was that attempted his life?”

“I am,” replied the stranger; “say but that the thousand zechins you offer for his detection shall be mine, and I

will make him known to you—deliver him up into your power.”

“Doubt me not,” returned the conte; “the proclamation which I have made to that effect is your security for the performance of my promise. Tell me then who is the villain.”

“Myself,” replied the stranger.

“You!” ejaculated Sylvio.

“You!” echoed Della Piacca; “and are you come hither voluntarily to expose yourself to the vengeance of the law?”

“Even so,” returned the young man. “My life has been a series of infamy, not from choice, but because I found the hardened nature of the world to be such, that by the pursuit of virtue, I could not procure bread for an aged parent, whose sole dependence for support was on me; for her, therefore, and not for myself, have I been a villain. The moment is now arrived, at which I may expiate my crimes, by the punishment which is due to them; and by the same act ensure to my parent comfort and in-

dependence for the remainder of her days. Conduct me, therefore, to prison; but ere I die, grant me the satisfaction of knowing my mother possessed of the thousand zechins which you have offered for my apprehension."

With equal astonishment did the conte and Sylvio listen to this declaration on the part of the stranger; the confession he had made of the atrocity of his past life, and his heroic intention of sacrificing his own existence to secure the independence of a parent in want, appeared to them irreconcilable contradictions.

"Who are you?" exclaimed Della Piacca; "what is your name?"

"Michael Vivane," replied the young man.

"Michael Vivane!" repeated the conte. "Have you then any knowledge of a woman named Rodovina Maritos?"

"Knowledge of her!" exclaimed Vivane—"fiend of hell! it is to her that I owe my fall from those principles which

can alone render man happy and respected; by being a witness of her atrocities —by listening to her unwholesome precepts, and following her vicious examples, I have sunk gradually into error. But the hour of delusion is past; my resolution has not forsaken me with my honour; and I will expiate my crimes with death and ignominy in this life, in the hope of forgiveness being granted to me in the next.”

The young man's case appeared interesting to the conte and Sylvio, not only on account of his connection with the vile Rodovina, but also from the sentiments of repentance which seemed to flow in sincerity from his heart; and they requested him to relate to them such particulars of his life as were connected with Rodovina, and her designs upon Sylvio.

Vivane readily complied, and spoke thus:—“ My father was once a creditable tradesman in this city. On the day that I completed my seventeenth year, he died. I was his only child, and so

great had been the repute of wealth and worth, that had ever been attached to his name, that my mother believed she should find herself in possession of an ample fortune at his decease; instead of which, picture to yourself her disappointment, her misery, at finding that her husband had died insolvent, and that nothing was left her which she could now call her own, except a few articles of wearing apparel, and some ornaments of trifling value.

“ The sudden and unexpected discovery of the wretched situation to which she was fallen, produced so great a shock upon her frame, that it, in some slight measure, affected her reason, and reduced her to a state of nervous weakness and ill health, from which she has never recovered.

“ I alone appeared to her the single comfort which Heaven had spared her in the midst of all her calamities. But, alas! her hopes in me were visionary, at least as far as they had referred to the

future honour and credit to which I might rise in the world.

“ My mother had had the principal direction of my education, and relying on my father’s being possessed of a sufficient fortune to enable me to live without the drudgery of following any trade, I had been left uninstructed in such branches of knowledge as might, at the time of his death, have led to my advancement in life.

“ How melancholy an example is my case, of the necessity of every man being made acquainted with those branches of useful knowledge which cannot burden the understanding of the richest, which are serviceable to the lowest orders of society, and of which the most pre-eminent quality is their power of extricating, from the gulf of misfortune, those who are doomed by fate to slip in their passage through life from the eminences of fortune, on which they had believed themselves to be securely treading!

“ Totally unacquainted how to ren-

der myself useful in trade, I found no one willing to take upon himself the pains or the humanity of becoming my instructor; and every application I made for the purpose of procuring myself a situation, was attended with a negative, that every time discouraged me more and more from renewing it in any other quarter.

“Driven from our home by my father's creditors, I took up my abode, with my remaining parent, in a mean dwelling in a back street of the city, where we subsisted on the sale of such articles as had been her own private property in the lifetime of her husband. My constant thoughts were placed upon the beggary to which we must inevitably be reduced when they were all gone, if fortune did not favour me, in presenting to me the means of averting the evil from my parent and myself. She appeared as if she had lost the faculty of thinking, partook sparingly of such food as I provided for her, without any comments or inquiries how it was procured,

and continued to weep almost incessantly. Thus, by the melancholy state into which she had fallen, I was deprived of the only counsellor upon whose advice I could have relied in my present forlorn situation.

“ False shame for a long time prevented me from offering myself to perform those menial offices by which I saw many lads of my age, who had been brought up differently to myself, earning a livelihood. At length the necessities of my mother overcame my delicacy, and I presented myself at one of the travelling waggons, for the purpose of either assisting in carrying the luggage of the passengers, or shewing the way to those who were strangers to any part of the city where their business might lie.

“ The first man to whom I acted in the capacity of servant, was a priest. He gave me a small trunk to carry, and ordered me to follow him. As we went along, I told him that I had been reduced from a very different situation, to

the one he now saw me in; that I had a mother ill, and hoped, for the love of humanity, he would reward me generously. He did not reply, and when we reached the gate of the monastery to which I found he belonged, he stopped, and receiving the trunk at my hands, said—‘God bless thee and thy mother!’ and entered the gate.

‘Will you not reward me for my trouble, father?’ exclaimed I.

‘Prayers,’ replied he, ‘are the only rewards our fraternity ever bestow; those thou hast had;’ and with these words he disappeared.

“What were my feelings at that moment it is impossible for me to describe! I could have rushed upon any vice, to relieve the necessities of my suffering mother;—lied, stolen, nay, even murdered, so inexpressible an effect had this mark of inhumanity, from one in the habit to which I had ever been taught to look up for the example of my life, produced on my mind.

‘Is not this,’ I exclaimed, ‘an authority for criminality in me, when I observe one whose office it is to preach the duties of charity, thus making a mock of affliction in his actions? If this is the conduct of the world at large, if the ministers of religion can reconcile it to their consciences to bestow only prayers on those who stand in need of actual relief, can it be a sin in me to feed a hungry mother by any means which present themselves to my hand?’

“It was at this moment that the advice of a truly well-disposed heart would have convinced me of my erroneous judgment, and led back my heated imagination to the path of rectitude, from which it was now straying; but no such counsellor presented himself to my ear. It was my fate to meet with a being of an exactly contrary disposition, whose frail arguments at this moment fixed my ideas in the horrid channel they were roving in—and this being was no other than Rodovina Maritos.

“She lived in the neighbourhood

where my mother and myself resided. She had before spoken to me, more than once, on the subjects of the day; and now chancing to meet me on my way home, after the disappointment which had attended my first attempt at service, she addressed me, inquiring what was the matter with me, that I looked so angry and unhappy? in few words I explained to her my case.

‘ You have met with nothing uncommon to those who are acquainted with the world,’ she answered. ‘ Those who are most able to afford relief to such as stand in need of it, are always the most backward in its performance—and men who set forth the doctrines of goodness, like priests and orators, are always found to be satisfied with moving others to virtue, without practising it themselves. If you are in the needy situation you say,’ she continued, ‘ come and be occasionally at my house—I have many little offices wherein I can make you useful, and with much more ease to yourself than the slavery of a porter’s business.’

you were not born to work, I am surè.'

"I confessed such to be the case.

'Nor shall you work, at least not in any way that shall fatigue you,' said she, 'if you will come and be at my house. Walk with me, and I'll shew you where it is.'

"I complied—and not to detain you upon this part of my narrative, I found her house handsome and well furnished; her daughter Vitellia, and another young girl, whom she called her niece, resided in it, beside herself. She told me that they were both unfortunate in not having a brother, which frequently exposed them to rude attacks from young men of quality without morals; and that if I would act the part of a protecting relative to them, she would, in return for my kindness, consider me, and treat me as her son. I suspected no ill of one who spoke so fairly, and procured myself apparel suitable to the appearance of her son, for which she provided me with money—and I was at her house as much as she desired my company.

“ In a short time I discovered that both the young females had lovers, at whose visits I was seldom admitted to their presence, but regularly detained there when any other men came to the house; and, in a few months more, my eyes were opened to the real nature of every thing which I saw. But Rodovina had so far inveigled me into her toils and her opinions, that I saw it not in the light of disgust and horror, with which it would have inspired me, had I been less ably trained than I had been during my noviciate in her service.

“ At the end of about a year, reflection began to steal into my mind; but as my mother’s faculties continued as incapable of argument as they had been from the few first days after her present misfortunes had fallen upon her, and as I had no acquaintance beside herself, but such as were living in situations similar to my own, the ideas which one hour of solitude would give birth to, were ever dispelled by the conversation of my associates.

“ Thus passed on four years, during which Rodovina Maritos had twice changed her habitation, and her daughter and pretended niece had twice as often transferred their favours from one object to another; and, during these years, the most arduous task which had been imposed upon me, had been that of representing the husband of Vitellia, to an old nobleman, on whose purse the keen-eyed Rodovina had fixed her desires. The plan succeeded, and I had a share, although a limited one, of the spoil, with which I increased, to my unhappy mother, such comforts as she was capable of tasting.

“ Time moved on in a monotonous round of disgusting similarity—I felt my trammels more keenly every day, and every hour I wished more ardently to be freed from them; but I felt, also, that I had entered upon a plan of life which must have cut off from me the possibility of ever being admitted into an honourable employment—that, if I should quit my present means of exist-

ence, I could not hope to procure any other except of the same nature—and thus I must either continue to pursue a life, which I abhorred, or see my mother reduced to want for the gratification of my feelings, which it would be in vain for me to attempt to explain to her. She would judge me cruel, unfeeling, unnatural, if her comforts were curtailed to her; and only be able to comprehend that it must be to some fault of mine that the change was owing.

“ In this conflict of mind, months and years passed on, till Vitellia was ~~taken~~ ^{sent} into the house of the merchant Eldorado to reside, and contrived that her mother should also be admitted as a resident with her. Rodovina told me of her good fortune, and added, that, as I had been docile and attentive while in her service, as she now plainly called it, and as it was very possible that the wheel of fortune might quickly revolve, and she might again be glad of me for one of her household, she would continue my friend.

“ Not having, now, her house to resort to, I was entirely at my own disposal, and had more leisure for my reflections; and I had actually come to the resolution of quitting my present mode of life, when Rodovina, calling on me one day, as she had frequently done, with small sums of money, since her residence in the merchant's house, informed me, that her daughter, Vitellia, had wheedled the old miser into marrying her, and that she was, on the following day, privately to become his wife. After his death, therefore,’ added she, ‘ we shall have a round sum at our disposal, and I will then find you an honourable situation in my daughter's family, as a reward for your past adherence to our interest.’

“ This intelligence gave me some satisfaction. I hoped that both mother and daughter would now abjure their former habits, and that it would not, at the time she had mentioned, be any disgrace to me to be one of their family.

“ On the day that she announced to

me^d her daughter's marriage with the signor Eldorado, she made me a handsome present; for her exultation at the success of her plans had opened her heart—and I saw her no more for nearly two months.

“ When we met again, her countenance was not, by any means, so expressive of pleasure as it had been when we had last parted. She said, that, in her eagerness to procure her daughter an alliance with the signor Eldorado, she had not so fully considered, as she ought to have done, the importance of compelling him to fix on her a handsome settlement at his death; and that now he had, by marriage, obtained the possession of her daughter's person, which she had artfully instructed her to withhold from him for some weeks previous to the time of his making her his wife, as a stimulus to urge him to the action, she could not succeed in inducing him to alter the will, which she knew to have been, for some time past, made by him solely in favour of his children.

“ However chagrined as she might be herself, she abated not of her usual generosity to me, probably dreading that the time was near at hand when she might again feel the want of my services.

“ Some time after she had given me this unsatisfactory intelligence, she again sought me out, at her accustomed hour in the evening. Fortune, she said, had once more smiled upon her: a gentleman, whom she had, in the most unexpected and strange manner, discovered to be heir to an immense property, had seen her daughter at mass—had fallen violently in love with her—and requested an introduction to her through her, whom he supposed to be her *gover-nante*. The gentleman to whom she was alluding, she proceeded to say, had fallen into the error of believing her daughter to be the child of the merchant Eldorado—that she had encouraged his idea—and having found that the tongue of rumour had informed him that the merchant would not allow his daughter to entertain a suitor during his lifetime,

on account of his aversion to portioning her off before his death, which was the actual truth, she had taken advantage of this circumstance, for acting with such pretended caution as should prevent him from being seen by the father, by which means she had also prevented him from seeing the signora Lucia, the real daughter of the merchant. All, she said, had prospered hitherto under her management, and she doubted not but that immediately on the death of the signor Eldorado, the gentleman of whom she spoke would marry Vitellia, and carry her to the estate to which he was heir, at a great distance from hence, which would effectually prevent him from ever discovering that it was not the daughter of the deceased miser whom he had taken to wife.

“ You, sir,” said Vivane, interrupting himself in his narrative, and addressing Sylvio, “ are the gentleman on whom she had fixed to execute this vile deception.”

“ I am !” replied Sylvio.

“ You cannot, signor,” continued Michael, “ imagine how eagerly I desired to know your name, that I might have informed you of the toils that were spreading for you, and trusted to the generosity of your nature to have placed me, as my reward, in a situation no longer to need those wages my soul abhorred to receive from the hand of Rodovina ; but she had, doubtless, sufficient cunning to fear that such might be the issue of her entrusting me with it—for she tenaciously withheld from me that, and every particular by which I could have guessed at the person whom she had marked out for her dupe.”

CHAP. XI.

MICHAEL Vivane proceeded thus:—
“ Would that the discovery of your name had been permitted me by the kindness of fate, I had not then stood accursed, as I now do, in the eyes of

Heaven and of man.”—His voice faltered ; he endeavoured to collect his fortitude, and continued speaking thus—“ When she summoned you into the court of justice, on her accusation of your having refused to fulfil a promise of marriage which you had made to her daughter, she sent to call me to her, and informed me of what she had done, telling me, for the first time, your name, and adding, that she made no doubt but that the law would award her daughter so heavy a recompence, as would immediately impel you rather to take her to wife, than submit to so great a diminution of your property.

“ In the evening of the same day, the report of the city informed me what had been the event of the trial, and also of Rodovina’s having been detained a prisoner, on suspicion of her having been the murderer of the merchant Eldorado, who, it was discovered, had died by poison. Scarcely had this intelligence reached me, ere she sent to

summon me to her in the prison where she was confined.

‘ I have much business, and business of importance, for you to perform,’ she said, the moment she saw me.—‘ I am accused of having been the murderer of the merchant Eldorado; they have already discovered that he died by poison.’

“ I started and shuddered. She did not appear to notice my emotion, but added—‘ I shall foil their plans with regard to myself, and, at the same time, gain revenge on Di Rosalva; I shall accuse him of the murder of Eldorado, which I shall make it appear that he perpetrated, in order to accelerate his marriage with her whom he supposed to be his daughter.’

‘ Horrid idea!’ I exclaimed; ‘ but how can you expect to gain belief to this assertion?’

‘ You,’ she replied, ‘ must ensure me that, by appearing in my favour as a witness to the deed.’

“ Her words struck me with so great

horror, that I trembled at every joint, and was unable to speak.

‘Not only this,’ she continued, ‘but you must also render it impossible that this Di Rosalva should appear to confront my declaration—and his not appearing in the court will immediately give colour to my fabrication, by rendering it believed that he is fled, under the alarm of justice overtaking him for his crime, which will at once absolve me of suspicion.’

‘I will sooner die!’ I exclaimed, ‘than become accessory to a plan of this heinous nature.’

‘Many men,’ she answered, ‘can talk calmly of death, who have not the fortitude to stare him in the face. You will be put to the test,’ she continued; ‘for, unless you comply with my proposals, you *must* die yourself.’

“Again I fixed my eyes on her in silence, unconscious whether or not I heard her right.

‘Shall I explain myself?’ she said. ‘Thus then—if you refuse to make it

impossible for Di Rosalva to contradict the charge which I shall refute upon him, I will bring into court satisfactory proof of *your* having been the administerer of the poison to Eldorado.'

'Almighty Heaven!' I, with difficulty, articulated, 'can there be such wickedness in the breast of a human being?'

"Is there any human being," she returned, 'who will not put in practice any *méasure* to save his own life?'

'However guilty,' I replied, 'I may, from your instruction and example, have been in other respects, you know me entirely innocent of the merchant Eldorado's death. How then can you talk of bringing satisfactory proofs against me into a court of justice?'

'Do you not,' she returned, with the malicious smile of a demon seated on her lips, 'recollect my one night employing you to fetch me a drug from an obscure vender of medicines, in a retired part of the city? that was the draught which sent old Eldorado to his account. I feared Di Rosalva's patience

would be worn out, by his being so long kept in expectation of the hand of the supposed Lucia, and I, therefore, accelerated the event which was to give her him to wife.'

'Heaven and earth! was I made the instrument of procuring you an accursed draught, which has curtailed a fellow-being of his allotted portion of years?' I rejoined.

'Have I not paid you handsomely,' she cried, 'for the utility you have been of to me?'

'Were you to crush me beneath the weight of your gold,' I replied, 'you could not reward me for the loss of that guiltless mind I possessed when you first knew me.'

"She increased her smile, as it were, with the satisfaction which she experienced from the assurance I had now given her, of my ruin being chargeable upon her, but spoke not.

'Equally,' said I, 'do I defy you to bring a proof that I have been the mon-

ster your baseness would assert me to be."

"Do you?" she cried, with a serenity of tone and countenance which I believed to be assumed, till she added—
"Advance, my better friend."

"Her eyes, as she spoke these words, were turned towards a door in her cell that stood open, and from which immediately issued, in compliance with her call, a needy, mean, and squalid male figure, which I instantly recollected to be the indigent wretch at whose miserable shed I had, according to the direction of Rodovina, bought that drug, of which I had never, till this fatal night, suspected the nature."

Vivane paused a moment, then said—
"I am sensible how repugnant to the feelings of men like yourselves must be the description of scenes, which display the most wretched depravity of human nature; I shall therefore hasten to the conclusion of my account."

"The vendor of the drug, whose name was Iago Zinoti, I found to be a wretch of such abject necessity, and so

devoid of every pretension to those qualities of the heart which alone do honour to the name of man, that he was entirely at the disposal of Rodovina, and ready to act his allotted part in any villany of which she might command the perpetration.

“ A few minutes conversation with this Zincti convinced me, that, if I did not agree to enter into the diabolical plan of Rodovina against your existence, my own life would immediately pay the forfeit of my refusal. In this case my wretched, my necessitous parent, would be left alone in the world, without one consoling hand to relieve her wants: the reflection was insupportable—maddening; it drove me to the resolution of making any sacrifice of myself, rather than condemning an aged parent to die deserted and in want.

“ How dreadful were the pangs of thought which I endured, when, at the dead hour of midnight, I quitted the prison, and the infamous woman whom

its walls enclosed ! How did I curse the first moment of my acquaintance with her ! How did I lament that I had not exerted my resolution to free myself from her toils, when I first began to perceive the banefulness of her character ! One moment I had half resolved to fly from the city ; but, in this case, the same calamities would overtake my mother as in that of my death, as she was incapable of moving with me. The presence of the villanous Zincti, also, who refused to leave me till we should have perpetrated the deed required of us by Rodovina Maritos, would have rendered this step impracticable, had there been no other obstacle to it in my own mind.

“No consideration could, that night, have induced me to have returned to the habitation beneath whose humble roof slept my mother. Strange it is, that, when the mind is perplexed by the dread of horrors attendant on conscious criminality, its greatest torture should frequently arise more from concomitant circumstances, than from the contempla-

tion of that act from whence they spring.

“Zincti led me to his own home—the wretched habitation where I had so innocently made the purchase commanded me by the vile Rodovina, and upon which she had doubtless employed me, with an artful view to the emergency in which she might be placed by its use, and the hold it would, in such case, give her upon my services; as Zincti being, to every appearance, as intimate with her as I was, there could have been no necessity for her sending me to fetch it from his shop.

“Zincti placed liquor before me, and endeavoured to reconcile my mind to the business which my soul abhorred to think upon, by recounting to me the various acts of a like heinous nature in which he had been an actor. I listened to him, but was not moved by his arguments. I drank, almost unconscious of so doing; and, having swallowed a greater quantity of liquor than the harassed state of my brain was able to bear, I fell asleep in the chair where I sat.

My mother had been the constant object of my waking thoughts, and she continued so, now they were locked in sleep: I dreamt that I saw her lying on a miserable pallet, more pale and emaciated than she really was, her eyes dim, her lips quivering—‘Where,’ I imagined she faintly pronounced, ‘is my son, that he brings me no food to save me from death?’—So forcibly was the idea of her voice impressed on my senses, that I awoke at the supposed sound, and was surprised to find that I was not by her side.

“Zincti had thrown himself upon a bed, and called to me to come and take part of it. I felt faint, sick, and trembling; I staggered to the bed, and fell down upon it. Zincti soon slept again; for myself, my thoughts, horrid as they were, were less painful than the dread of a repetition of my soul-harrowing dream, and I forbore to close my eyes again. When the morning came, Zincti did not attempt to open his shutter. The day passed in a kind of awful stillness, which I was constantly wishing to have broken,

and still the slightest noise made me start and tremble violently. Towards evening Zincti produced the masks and stilettoes, which were to be our only equipment for the deed of horror. Zincti had seen you, and was acquainted with your person; for myself, I knew you not. We were to lurk about the places of evening resort for gentlemen, he told me; and when you left any of these, in which we might happen to find you, we were to follow you, and, at the first convenient and private moment that should present itself to us, effect our purpose.

‘Come,’ said he, ‘take your mask and stiletto—by the Holy Mother, it is time for us to be going.’

“The word *mother* brought to my mind afresh a train of sensations, which finally resolved me to become the wretch I hated.

“It is unnecessary for me, signor,” continued Vivane, addressing Sylvio, “to repeat to you in what part of the city we first found you; for I am conscious that you saw us observing you, which

intimidated us from attacking you for a long time. At length you ascended the steps of this palazzo. I had the villainous courage to point my stiletto at your breast—but I had not the courage of a practised villain, for my hand lingered in its purpose; and although you fell beneath my stroke, I still entertained the consolatory hope, that the feebleness of my resolution had been your safeguard from death.

“ The moment you fell, Zincti fled. I returned instantly to the habitation of my mother, whom I had not visited since the preceding afternoon, and there I passed the night and the present day, in a state of inexpressible torment of mind; one moment I hoped that the blow I had given you might not prove fatal to your life, and that I should thus be spared the curse of a murderer—at another, I dreaded the vengeance of Rodovina, which, I could not doubt, would fall upon me, if she discovered that you were still in existence.

“ Zincti did not approach me, nor did

I receive any message from Rodovina herself.

“About two hours ago, as I sat by the casement, which I had opened for air, for air had been the only refreshment which I had felt myself capable of tasting throughout the day, I heard a proclamation pronounced, which awarded one thousand zechins to him who should discover either of the two villains that had, on the preceding evening, attacked a gentleman on the steps of the palazzo della Piacca.

“I instantly conceived the idea which I have just imparted to you, of delivering up myself to justice, on the certainty of the promised sum being settled upon my unfortunate mother; and thus, by one action, rendering her future days independent, and atoning for my past crimes; and for this purpose am I now come hither.” Here Vivane paused.

“How strange a contradiction does this man display!” said Di Rosalva.

“It is true,” replied the conte, “but

I believe him to be possessed of a mind of much feeling; and such dispositions frequently combine in them contradictions, which few but those who feel their existence can believe ever to unite in the human heart."

"Rodovina Maritos," continued the conte, addressing Vivane, "has already mentioned you to the court, as one able to prove Sylvio di Rosalva to be the administerer of poison to the deceased merchant Eldorado; and you were yesterday sought for that purpose by the officers of justice."

"This I supposed," replied Vivane. "Why they found me not, is explained by what I have told you of my having throughout the day remained in the house of Iago Zincti."

"I shall now immediately," said the conte, "dispatch a messenger, with information to the officers of justice, that Michael Vivane is found, and will to-morrow morning appear in court."

"It is my desire you should do so,"

returned Vivane; "let me till that time be led to prison."

The unparalleled instance of conduct to which parental affection had driven Michael Vivane, had created for him an interest in the hearts both of the conte and Sylvio, which even the recollection of his crime could not entirely divest them of; and the conte said—"The sense of repentance which you now display, raises you above the rank of the stubborn criminal; you shall therefore not be exposed to the rigours of a prison during this night, but remain beneath the roof of my palazzo."

Vivane acknowledged that he heard the conte's indulgence with gratitude, but he did not appear to receive it as a mark of favour which was acceptable to his feelings; his whole soul seemed intent on the voluntary death to which he had delivered himself up, and the benefit which was to accrue from the act to his parent.

Sylvio and the conte continued in conversation with him for some time,

and the subject of their discourse leading them to mention Rosabella, Michael Vivane was informed that it had not been the signor Sylvio, in whose presence he now stood, but his unfortunate sister, whose breast his stiletto had on the preceding evening pierced, and who was still suffering from the wound.

The sorrow and contrition which Vivane had already expressed, at the detestable deed which his hand had attempted to perpetrate, were feeble emotions of regret, when compared with those which now burst from his lips, on learning that an innocent female had been the victim of his diabolical act.—“I now insist,” he exclaimed, “on being led to prison; the rugged flints which compose its pavement are the only bed worthy to bear a wretch like myself, till the hour arrives at which I shall stretch my sinful frame upon the wheel; summon the officers of justice; lead me to the dungeon that I merit.”

The conte and Sylvio were so strongly moved by the agonies of remorse un-

der which they saw him suffering, that they could not forbear offering some consolation to his mind ; but he received it with entire apathy.

The conte had reasons for not choosing to deliver him up to the custody of the officers of justice till the following morning, and made arrangements for his being retained at the palazzo that night. Vivane was accordingly obliged to comply, but he appeared to consider himself sinful in accepting the slightest mitigation of a murderer's fate, during the protracted period of his present existence.

CHAP. XII.

ON the following morning, at a proper hour, the conte Della Piacca, and Sylvio di Rosalva, proceeded to the court of justice, whither they had caused Michael Vivane to be conducted before them.

Previously to their setting out, they

had promised him to use all their interest in his favour with the judge, in order to procure a mitigation of his punishment; but Vivane had, as on the preceding evening, heard all their promises with indifference: his desire still was to expiate the crimes of his existence, by condign punishment from the hands of the law.

Rodovina entered the court with an air of firmness and insolence; she had heard that Michael Vivane was already there, awaiting her coming; but not having entertained the most remote idea that he was there in any character but that of her sworn friend, she had gathered courage from the information.

The judge had been made acquainted with the circumstance of Vivane's confessions, on the preceding night; he accordingly proceeded, upon that information, to the examination of the culprits before him.

Amazement is a weak term to express the horrors of surprise which were portrayed on the countenance of Rodovina,

when she heard herself accused of the murder of Eldorado by Vivane; and there are not words of sufficient strength to convey an adequate idea of her feelings, when she beheld Iago Zincti, whom the conte Della Piacca had taken means to have apprehended, led into the court, pale and trembling, and immediately accused by Vivane as the man who had been an accomplice in her crime, by having sold her the drug of death, with a certain knowledge of the use to which it was her intention to apply it.

The courage of Iago Zincti was of that nature, of which it usually is in depraved hearts, insolent and confident in security, trembling and fugitive when it meets danger; he fell on his knees before the court, and, urging his poverty as the plea of his crime, supplicated for mercy.

With his courage fell the last hope of the frantic Rodovina; she sunk upon a bench before which she had been standing, and uttered a groan, which was by many believed to be her last. Restora-

tives were called in, and a few minutes proved it to have been only the effect of the stifled rage and disappointment which were rending her heart.

Still one last attempt at self-preservation remained to her—she again rose, and was endeavouring to prove to the court that Vivane and Zincti had been bought to work her destruction, by the revengeful Sylvio di Rosalva: to this accusation it became his business to reply, and having acquainted the court that Rodovina had, on one of his visits to the house of the late Eldorado, informed him that the physician had said that the old miser would not live out the month, and that she had pronounced that *he would die on that day fortnight*, on which very day he had breathed his last—which facts the conte Della Piacca and Sylvio's lawyer both vouching for his having declared to them to have taken place long before he knew such persons as either Michael Vivane or Iago Zincti to be in existence—he concluded by saying—"That he thought

the judge could not for a moment hesitate to admit the evidence of Vivane."

Iago Zincti was immediately questioned by the judge, whether the drug which he had sold to Vivane, and which he had conveyed to Rodovina, for the purpose of producing the death of the merchant Eldorado, had been the aqua tophana?

Every one present was well acquainted that it must have been from the administering of this drug alone, that Rodovina could have ascertained the exact period of her victim's death: on Zincti's answer, therefore, to this demand, seemed to depend the decision of her fate and criminality.

Rodovina saw Zincti hesitating how to reply, and a spark of hope once more warmed her breast.

"You had better answer at once," rejoined the judge, addressing Iago. "As I know you to have been concerned in this criminal transaction, from your own confession—your obstinacy in withholding any part of it from me, will but pro-

voke me to command it to be wrung from you by torture."

At the mention of the torture, the coward heart of Zincti sunk still lower in his breast.—"Have mercy on me," he said, "and I will confess—it was—it was the aqua tophana which I sent to Rodovina Maritos, by the hands of Michael Vivane."

"Hell blaze for thy reception!" shrieked Rodovina; and all sense fled from her.

While restoratives were again using to recal her to life, the judge made inquiry of Vivane, and the abject Zincti, whether they believed Rodovina's daughter, Vitellia, to have been a confederate in her mother's crime? and as they both declared their opinion of her innocence, she was not summoned to witness the dreadful scene of her mother's condemnation.

While Rodovina was yet so far senseless as to be unable to comprehend the words of the judge, the conte Della Piacca explained to him the unexampled conduct and situation of Vivane—"He

had also," he said, " taken the most satisfactory means for ascertaining the truth of the account he had given of his respectable birth, and the wretched state of his mother; and he hoped, on these considerations, mercy would be extended towards him."

These words on the part of the conte Lorenzo, were spoken in the ear of the judge; Vivane, therefore, was not conscious of their passing, and, of course, prevented from seconding or contradicting the petition of the conte, which latter, in the present wretched state of his mind, it is most probable that he would have done. He sat awaiting his sentence with a resolute composure, which bespoke the most praiseworthy repentance; while the meanly-minded Zincti stood in the trembling suspense of a child, who dreads the correction of an offended superior.

When Rodovina Maritos again expressed signs of life and intelligence, the judge addressed her, inquiring if she had any thing to say in her own defence, in

contradiction to the charge of which she stood convicted?

“ I fall,” she said, “ by the malice of my enemies; may the pangs which I now endure be delight, when compared with the agonies in which they quit life!”

To this exclamation the judge returned an address, which exhorted her to calm the turbulent passions of her mind, and to exert the only virtue which was now left her to perform, that of meeting the fate which justice was about to award her, with a tranquil and sincere repentance; that in dedicating her last hours to the purpose of dying a Christian, she might quit life with some expectation of receiving forgiveness in a future state.

She had a cross upon her neck—for the most vicious deceive the world, and even themselves, by the outward forms of virtue; she caught hold of it, gazed upon it for an instant, and again letting it fall from her fingers, shuddered, and cast down her eyes.

Her action evinced that the judge’s

exhortation had not passed unheeded through her senses, but that she had omitted to be devout, till she feared to pray at all.

“ You then have nothing to urge in your defence,” said the judge, after a short time which he had given her for reflection.

Upon the repetition of this question, the blood, in the course of the same minute, several times fled away from, and again returned to, her cheeks; and her lips were as frequently seen to move, but without sound: at length a faint—“ No,” audible only to those who stood near her, proceeded from them.

The most awful moment of the criminal's life was now approaching; that, at which the administrator of justice, whose voice speaks collectively for every honest heart, declares him no longer worthy to exist in the society of man, into which his Creator originally sent him, free from vice, and for which his own frail passions have unfitted him.

Even Rodovina trembled when the

judge rose to pronounce her fate. His words were few, but impressive. On the second day from the present, he condemned Rodovina Maritos, convicted of the wilful murder of Henrico Eldorado, to die upon the wheel: the interval he once more recommended to her to use in attempts to make her peace with Heaven. Her sentence being pronounced, she was conducted to her cell.

To Iago Zincti, as a willing accomplice in the deed, the punishment of death was also adjudged, but with the indulgence of not expiring beneath the tortures of the wheel.

Michael Vivane was lastly placed opposite to the judge. In an address of feeling, humanity, and strong sense combined, the judge called the attention of the whole court, to observe how conspicuously, in the instance of the culprit now before them, the evils of pride, indolence, and disgraceful connections, had driven him; in whose heart they had insensibly taken root, even to the dreadful act of raising his hand against the life of

a fellow-being. He next represented to Michael Vivane himself, the manifold mischiefs of which the death of an individual being, setting aside the heinousness of the crime itself, which cuts him off from life, might be productive, and which all naturally tend to swell the account of him at whose hand he receives his unfair death.—“ You are repentant,” he added, “ and I rejoice to behold you so; trusting that the penitent atonement of your future days may prepare you to die in the purity of heart in which you entered life, your existence is spared you; the law does not consider the attempt, and the perpetration of a crime, as the same; your punishment is, therefore, confined to three years of imprisonment. Again I exhort you to employ your time in making your repentance worthy of the divine acceptance.”

“ Notwithstanding the resolution I had formed of dying,” said Vivane, as he was led from the court, “ I rejoice in the lenity of my sentence: my mother will



not now descend to the grave the parent of an executed criminal."

Sylvio and the conte directly followed him to his cell, where they congratulated him on the lenity of his sentence, and promised that every attention should, through their means, be paid to his mother. Of the thousand zechins, which were his due, he refused to accept the smallest share, for the purpose of providing himself any comfort in his imprisonment, but insisted on their being all appropriated to the use of his mother.

CHAP. XIII.

BEFORE they left the prison, the prediction which the conte Della Piacca had made to Sylvio, that the dread of futurity would open the lips of Rodovina, concerning what was known to her of his fate, was verified; she sent to request their presence in her dungeon.

The apprehension of death had hum-

bled the hitherto strong mind of Rodovina, and the moment she saw them, she exclaimed—"If I confess to you all I know concerning Sylvio di Rosalva, will you, for my reward, exert your influence with the state for the preservation of my life?"

"You merit no reward," returned Della Piacca, "for a confession of circumstances, which it has been a crime in you, hitherto, to have concealed; nor will I flatter you with any promise which it is not my intention to fulfil. I conceive your sentence to be just, and, therefore, cannot act against my own conscience, by any attempt at getting it revoked."

"Must I then die!" shrieked out Rodovina, and sunk upon the straw, which had been placed for her bed, in one corner of her dungeon.

At this moment entered Vitellia, who had brought with her a priest; she started at the sight of Di Rosalva, and flew to her mother.

“ You have nothing to fear from me,” said Sylvio ; “ the accomplices of your mother’s infamy have declared you innocent of her most atrocious crime ; let her fate be a warning to yourself, to pursue that course no longer, which, if persevered in, may ultimately lead you to her misery and disgrace : if you have any interest with her, exert it to procure from her a confession of such circumstances as she is acquainted with concerning my history, and your recompence shall be the means of reform, without indigence, after her death.”

The tears were streaming down the cheeks of Vitellia.—“ Oh mother ! mother !” she said, “ for your own sake confess, and save your soul from perdition.”

“ Confession before death,” added the priest, “ is your only hope of averting, from your sinful soul, the wrath of God in a future state, which has already fallen upon you in this life.”

Rodovina fixed her eyes upon him with a frenzied stare.

The priest requested the conte and Di

Rosalva for a few moments to quit the cell, whilst he represented to her the awfulness of her present situation.

They complied, and entered the courtyard of the prison. In about a quarter of an hour the priest recalled them to the dungeon;—his arguments had prevailed;—her fear of death was now lost in her apprehensions of the state beyond that of dying; and, with a mistaken energy, she was, with wild shrieks, calling for mercy upon the son of God!

When the frantic emotions of her mind were, in some measure, appeased, she said—"I was born in sin, may it prove an atonement for my having lived in it!—Oh that I had never lived, thus to die!—Pray for me, that I may escape the eternal fire of God's retribution!"

She fell upon her knees, and her eyes appeared fixed, by the agony of her mind. Her daughter prevailed on her to drink some water, which she held to her lips—it seemed to cool the fever of her soul.

The priest and Vitellia raised her between them, and placed her on a stool. Clinging round her daughter, for support from falling, she turned her eyes upon Sylvio, and spoke thus—

“ My brother Julio and myself were the natural children of a man of the first distinction in Parma, by a peasant girl, whom he seduced. For eight years she enjoyed, in his protection, all the affluence and affection to which the title of a wife could have given her claim ; but, at the end of that period, he died suddenly, and his affairs were discovered to be so much involved, that there was not even enough left, after the expences of his funeral were defrayed, to pay the legacies which he had bequeathed to my mother and her children ; and from that time she was obliged to owe her own subsistence, and ours, to the wages of the profligate.

“ At the time she died, my brother had just completed his nineteenth year, and I my eighteenth. My brother had already passed through various scenes of

life;—he had lived in the service of a courtezan, had thence been a bravo, and, at length, was become one of a gang of pirates. I had been initiated by my mother into all the mysteries of her profession, and was now left to pursue my way through the world, without any hand to guide my steps.

“ For ten years I experienced a variety of fortune, in which adversity bore the greater share;—with the eleventh circumstances changed materially in my favour.—I became acquainted with a gentleman, some years older than myself, who placed me in a house, which he hired for my accommodation, and conducted himself towards me, in every respect, with the greatest liberality. For some time he concealed from me his name; but when I had lived with him about three years, and given birth to Vitellia, for she is his child, he informed me that he was the conte Roderigo Della Piacca, and that the reason of his having thus long forbore to let me into the knowledge of his name and rank, had been

his consideration for the feelings of his wife, who had died within the last few days.

“ Another year passed on like the former ones. At the expiration of this time, he one day came into my apartment, with a visible dejection hanging over his countenance. I inquired the cause of it, and after some hesitation, he replied to my inquiries by saying, that he had an only son, whom he had suffered to be as expensive in his pleasures as he was himself; that he had never curtailed him of any enjoyment which money could purchase him, because, although his own private property was, from this indulgence, fast decreasing, he had, till within the few last days, considered himself secure of inheriting considerable possessions, from a distant relative, which would repair his own broken fortune. This relative, he said, was named Di Rosalva, and lived upon his estate in the neighbourhood of Genoa; he had no personal knowledge of him, but was merely acquainted that,

in case of Di Rosalva's dying without a son, his landed property must, in the course of law, descend to him.

'About eight years ago,' he continued, 'this Di Rosalva married; my apprehensions were then great, lest a nearer heir than myself should appear to claim the possessions which I coveted. Seven years having passed away, during which no sign had appeared to give Di Rosalva the expectation of becoming a father, I considered myself once more as his undoubted heir: but a cloud has overcast my hopes—I have received intelligence from a friend, who has, for some time past, been my spy upon Di Rosalva's conduct, that his wife is pregnant.'

"Having thus explained to me his cause for anxiety, our conversation hereafter was scarcely on any other subject, and I endeavoured to console him in his disappointment, by representing to him that the sex of the child might prove feminine, which would exclude it from the inheritance, and that, at all events,

there was an equal chance of its life and death.

“ At length he brought me information that the signora Di Rosalva had given birth to twins, a male and a female, and that, in the extremity of the moment, she had expired.”

Here Rodovina discontinued speaking. The conte Della Piacca urged her to proceed.

“ I cannot,” she said, “ in the present wretched state of my mind, dwell minutely on the events of my past life; the leading circumstances of the explanation you require, I will endeavour to impart to you. Suffice it then to say, that knowing at that time no interest but that of the late conte Roderigo, he easily won me into a promise of employing persons to steal Di Rosalva’s male child, which stood between him and his inheritance.

“ In order to devise means for the performance of this act, he immediately transported me to Genoa, and left me with my brother Julio, who was at this

time one of a company of pirates, who sailed from that port. I imparted to my brother my business in Genoa, and informed him that the reward attached to the stealing of the child was two thousand zechins. On the fourth day after my arrival, my brother said to me—‘ If you will entrust me with the child, and pay me the reward offered for its death, I will put you into an easy method of serving your friend, by stealing it yourself, without employing any one in the business, who might hereafter be tempted by a reward from Di Rosalva to betray you. I liked the nature of his argument, and desired him to tell me his plan.

‘ One of my fellow-pirates,’ he returned, ‘ is the son of a woman named Maria Calotti, who is distantly related to the late signora Di Rosalva, and who has for years past been in the habit of receiving from her acts of kindness. This Maria Calotti, I have positively learnt from her son, is not known, except by name,

either to the signor Di Rosalva, or to his aunt, the lady Bianca. Personate her, therefore; go to the villa Di Rosalva, in pretended ignorance of the death of the signora, and excite the pity of the signor, by a tale of the ill treatment you are receiving from one of your sons: so great is his character for benevolence in the world, that he will, doubtless, detain you an inmate of his house, not less out of respect to your misfortunes, than your affinity to his late wife, while he makes an investigation into the merits of your case; and this opportunity you may employ to carry off his son.

“ After some hesitation, I agreed to the plan; and having disguised myself in a dress, such as was worn by the real Maria Calotti, I set out on foot for the villa Di Rosalva. On arriving there, the signora Bianca——”

“ We have already heard from Bianca,” said Della Piacca, “ an account of your nefarious proceedings, whilst beneath the roof of your hospitable entertainer, to whose peace you were devising

the means of becoming a serpent. Proceed to the moment of your quitting it with the child."

"My brother," rejoined Rodovina, "had accompanied me a part of the way from Genoa towards the villa Di Rosalva; we parted at a mean hut on the road, the owner of which he bribed to tenant him till my return; thither I immediately sped with the child; he instantly came out to me, and we proceeded to the first post-house, where he procured me a conveyance to transport me towards Parma, and another for himself, into which he ascended, after having received from my hands the child and the bag of gold; and since that time I have never seen him.

"On my return to the conte Roderigo, his transports exceeded all bounds, on learning that I had succeeded in the enterprise upon which his soul was placed: but in a very short time, the same spy who had given him intelligence of Di Rosalva's becoming a parent, informed him that the female twin had been

stolen, and that the male still lived beneath his father's roof. At first he believed his spy to have committed an unconscious error in the statement of the fact, and wrote to him, inquiring if he had not been guilty of a mistake, in regard to the sex of the child which had been stolen? and to this inquiry an answer was quickly returned, confirming the account which the former letter had brought.

“ In the first tumult of his feelings, the conte knew not whether to believe that I had deceived him in carrying off the girl instead of the boy, or that Di Rosalva had conceived the intention of repairing to himself the injury which had been done him in the theft of his child, by giving to his daughter, in the eye of the world, that sex which would secure to her the inheritance of her father's possessions.

“ At length I convinced him that I had been true to the trust he had reposed in me, and had executed it faithfully. His rage was then all, turned

against Di Rosalva, and his brain racked with plans for publicly exposing the sex of his remaining child; but Di Rosalva, he found, had been more subtle, in stratagem, than himself. Reflection taught him that it would be impossible for him to give evidence, in a court of justice, of the sex of the remaining child, without exposing, by the same means, that he was acquainted with the sex of the one which had been stolen, and consequently, a party in the theft.

“ It is not an uncommon instance to behold, that when the project upon which any man has placed his hopes, and his desires, falls to the ground, that his spirits, his resolution, and his health, fall with it. Such was the case with the conte Roderigo; all his enjoyments in life appeared from this moment to cease; and although he lived several years after the time of his experiencing this disappointment, they were years of melancholy sadness—they were years, during which he bore about with him, in his own heart, the punishment of the wrong

he had done to a fellow-being, who had never offended him.

"At his death he divided, between his son and myself, what property he had to bequeath; and, with my share, I shortly after removed to this city, for reasons which it is unnecessary for me to state to you.

"The son, I have learnt, survived his father but a few years."

"And here," said the conte, "your acquaintance with Vivane and Iago Zincti commenced?"

"Iago Zincti," replied Rodovina, "was a member of my family, for the first year of my residence here; when he left me to pursue a separate avocation, I invited Vivane to my house, to supply his station.

"At my first interview with the signor Sylvio," she continued, "I was not less surprised to find that he had mistaken my daughter for the signora Lucia, than I was at his informing me that his name was Sylvio di Rosalva. I had, from the first moment of my hearing

this, my suspicions of his being the very Sylvio whom I had stolen from his cradle. But I had no confirmation of my opinion, till in a letter which he wrote to Vitellia, he gave a short sketch of his history, exactly similar to that which he delivered a few days ago in the court, except that it mentioned the old man, with whom he resided on the mountains of Tortona, to have been named Julio. The name of my brother being that of his protector—my brother never having been heard of by me since the moment of his receiving the child at my hand, and his having declared to Sylvio that he had been hired to murder him—all tended to convince me that he must be Sylvio, the heir of Di Rosalva. Thus convinced, I determined to remove every obstacle which presented itself to his immediate union with my daughter, and to declare him to the world for the person he really was, the moment I had bound her the partner of his good fortune. To this end—merciful God, forgive me for the deed!—I administered

the aqua tophana to the merchant Eldorado!"

Her narrative concluded, Rodovina again burst forth into exclamations of horror, occasioned by a sense of her past crimes, and the expiation of them to which she was condemned! Violent convulsions followed those shrieks of terror, which she had mingled with frantic appeals to Heaven for mercy; and nature being exhausted within her, she sunk down upon the ground, where a faint trembling, which shook her joints, alone expressed her to be in a state of existence.

Having given orders that she should receive every necessary attention that her situation required, the conte Della Piacca and Sylvio left those gloomy walls, which in the persons of the culprits whom they enclosed, contained a warning lesson to the guilty to sin no more.

CHAP. XIV.

WHILE the circumstances just recorded were passing in the prison of Rodovina Maritos, and her associates in iniquity, an explanation, not less interesting to the feelings of those concerned in it, took place at the palazzo della Piacca.

It was late in the afternoon when the conte Lorenzo and Sylvio returned from the prison; and entering an apartment in the palazzo, adjoining to the bed-chamber of Rosabella, where they expected to see the family assembled, and awaiting their return, they were surprised by finding it vacant, and by observing a servant, who was leaving the bed-chamber adjoining to it, to shut the door with the utmost caution, as if afraid of disturbing the repose of some one within it.

The soul of Sylvio was immediately filled with apprehensions for his sister,

and he hastily demanded an explanation of what he saw. The surgeon Sorato directly appeared to give it, with a smile on his countenance, which relieved the mind of Sylvio before he spoke.—“Your sister,” he said, “fainted away about an hour ago, and I have since ordered her to be kept perfectly composed upon her bed, as the emotions of joy, if indulged, are sometimes as powerful as those of grief.”

“Joy!” repeated Sylvio.

“Even so, signor,” returned Sorato; “but here comes one who will explain all to you better than I am able to do.”

The contessa entered as he spoke, and immediately satisfied their curiosity by an account of the transactions of the morning, which, as her spirits were at the time violently agitated, may, perhaps, be more incoherent and diffuse than would agree with the impatience of our readers; we will, therefore, give the explanation in as few words as possible.

It will be remembered that the sig-

nora Bianca had said, that Rosabella had still *one secret* lurking in her breast, which no tongue but her own should reveal. At the moment of her making this declaration, Averilla was silent, but she believed herself to be perfectly acquainted what that secret was. On the morning of the present day, Rosabella had appeared so much recovered from her wound, that the contessa had felt no reluctance to indulge her in a recapitulation of the past events of their lives. When they had conversed for some time, Averilla said—"Bianca tells me that you have yet one secret labouring in your breast;—I think I am prophetess enough to divine what that is. When you mentioned to my aunt Felicia an alliance with her family, was it not your desire to declare to her your sex; and having done this, to avow to her an affection for the poor blind Felix, whom every other woman disregarded, on account of his infirmity of person, and to whom your generous heart allied you, for the virtues of his mind?"

“ Oh my friend,” returned Rosabella, “ you have penetrated into the inmost recesses of my heart!—To you I blush not to confess that my affections are placed on the amiable Felix ; but had he been possessed of that faculty, which would have permitted him the blessing of a free choice, never should I have entertained the presumptuous idea of making that election for him ; and should he now gain the blessing of his sight——”

“ You have then heard of the peasant, who is, at this moment, a visitor at the palazzo del Alvaretti?” said Averilla, interrupting her.

“ Heard !” exclaimed signora Bianca, with a smile ; “ it was she who sent him thither. A few days after we had quitted the villa Di Rosalva, chance introduced us to an object who had just recovered his sight, after having been for eleven years deprived of it. Eagerly she inquired who had been the happy instrument of restoring it to him. He informed us that it was an aged peasant, who resided on a small farm, in the duchy of

Tuscany, and who was at that time gone into France, in compliance with the intreaties of a lady of distinction, whose only daughter had been struck blind by lightning. Instantly she resolved that Felix should enjoy the benefit of his advice. We accordingly went into Tuscany, and took up our abode in the neighbourhood of his dwelling, where we awaited his return home.

“ At length he came; we visited him, and with a most gracious humanity, which marks his character, he promised to comply with our entreaties, and go with us to Genoa.

“ No sooner had she obtained his consent, than she felt a reluctance to appear in the business herself. After the violent anger, which the signor Rossano had manifested, at the idea of your forming an alliance with the supposed Sylvio Di Rosalva, she could not hope that he would ever permit his son to receive the hand of that same individual in marriage. Uncertain how it became her to act, she resolved to ask your advice for her con-

duct; and for this purpose, having sent forward the peasant Morano to Genoa, where we directed him to await our coming, we entered this city. We had not at that time heard that the Della Piacca, whom Rosabella dreaded, was no more; accordingly, fearing to be beheld by your husband, and yet unwilling to forego the desire of asking your counsel, in her present embarrassed situation, she sent you the letter, which you received from the hotel of the Holy Virgin. Your reply to it announced you to be confined to your chamber, and unconscious how soon it would be in your power to quit it. We had promised to meet Morano in three days, at the longest, in Genoa, and, therefore, were obliged to leave this city again without seeing you.

“ We found Morano, true to his appointment, at Genoa. Every hour since our acquaintance had first commenced with him, had given us additional proofs of his great benevolence, and excellent sense;—and, at my persuasion, Rosa-

bella entrusted to him the secret of her heart and history.

“ He listened, and replied to them in a manner that shewed him to be sufficiently interested in her cause, to act with all due regard to her happiness; and promising not to inform the family Del Alvaretti, by what means he had gained a knowledge of them and their son, he left us to proceed on his humane errand.

“ A few hours after he had set out for the villa del Alvaretti, I learnt, by a most unexpected accident, that the conte Roderigo della Piacca, and his son, who had been the enemies of the family Di Rosalva, had, for some years past, been dead; that the conte, your husband, was their very distant relative, and that to him the title and name had descended.

“ With ecstasy Rosabella received this intelligence from my lips, and instantly she determined again to return to Turin, and, under the consolation of your friendship, to the enjoyment of which there now no longer existed any obstacle, to await the issue of Morano’s

visit to the family Del Alvaretti. Her resolution was no sooner taken than put into effect. We quitted Genoa that very hour. With what has occurred to us since our return to this city, you are already acquainted."

"But I can give *you* some information," returned the contessa. "I have already received two letters from the signora Felicia, concerning the benevolent peasant, who is arrived at the villa del Alvaretti, and the occasion of his visiting it;" and as she spoke, she drew them from her pocket, and put them into the hands of Rosabella, at whose request the signora Bianca read them aloud.

When the second letter had been read, "Kind, benevolent Morano!" exclaimed Rosabella, "the interest which he feels in my happiness is the only motive from which he proposes to the signor Rossano, as the price of his son's sight, that if it ever be granted to him, he shall be unrestrained in his choice of an alliance. But, alas! Rossano hesitates to agree to

this. Thus, should he ever seem to acquiesce, and should Felix judge of me in my present character, as he did of me for a friend, there is no doubt but a father of this description will place some impediment in the way of our happiness."

The contessa was beginning to reply, when a servant, who entered the apartment, brought her a letter.—“ Whence comes this?” she asked; “ it is not the usual hour of the post.”

“ It is brought by a courier, who says he comes from Genoa,” answered the man.

Averilla tore it hastily open, and read the following words:—

“ Oh, my beloved Averilla! in what terms of sufficient gratitude to Heaven shall I inform you that my beloved Felix beholds the light of day? Yes, Averilla, Felix possesses the faculty of sight! My husband was, yesterday morning, prevailed upon to consent

to the conditions of the worthy peasant. The operation was successful, and Felix lost in ecstasy and wonder. I scarcely know what I write, only this, that Felix implores *to see* Averilla; and that his mother entreats her to come directly to this scene of joy. Hasten hither, with your husband, and bless, by your presence, your affectionate aunt,

“FELICIA DEL ALVARETTI.”

Having heard that the letter came from Genoa, it was impossible long to secrete, from Rosabella, its contents. The moment they were imparted to her, a faint shriek announced the effect which the intelligence had produced on her mind; and having uttered it, she sunk senseless into the arms of Bianca.

Such was the account of the transactions of the morning, delivered by Averilla to her husband and Sylvio, to which she added, that the violence of Rosabella's emotions had been softened, by a medicine administered to her by So-

rato; and that she trusted to find her composed, when she should awake from a slumber into which she had now fallen.

During the explanation given by the contessa, Bianca entered the room, and joined her in expressing eagerness to learn the events of the trials which the conte and Sylvio had just returned from witnessing.

With the omission of such circumstances as might shock the delicate feelings of their auditors, they recounted the awful scenes which had passed in the court of justice; and, subsequent to them, those in the prison to which the unhappy victims of iniquity had been conducted, after the voice of the law had pronounced judgment upon them.

In the evening, Rosabella informed them, through Sorato, that she felt a wish to join their party for an hour or two at the least, if he did not judge it advisable for her to leave her chamber for a longer time: they accordingly met

her in the apartment contiguous to that where she slept.

“ In the letter which the contessa received this morning from Genoa,” said Rosabella, when they were assembled around her, “ the signora Felicia particularly mentions that Felix desires *to see* Averilla; this request, I am certain she will not fail to comply with; and I think, if she would delay setting out till the day after to-morrow, I should be able to travel at the same time. I am extremely anxious to shew my brother the inheritance out of which he has so long been kept, and I should like to perform the journey in the company of friends whom I so much esteem, as those who would compose our party.”

Every one present looked at Sorato for his reply to this proposal.

He said—“ That the only complaint under which his patient now laboured was weakness; and that its most efficacious remedy was frequent indulgence in such points as the mind was warmly set upon, provided too much exertion

was not used in their accomplishment; and that, upon this consideration, he believed that if they would resolve not to perform their journey with too great rapidity, it would be more beneficial to Rosabella, to accompany them at the time she had mentionéd, than to be left where she was, merely to repine that she was not with them."

Rosabella heard his decision in favour of her petition with the most heartfelt joy; and the day after the next being, accordingly, fixed upon for the commencement of their journey towards Genoa, she promised, till the arrival of that hour, implicitly to obey the regulations of Sorato, that she might, by attending to them, render herself more adequate to the undertaking.

CHAP. XV.

THE morning appointed for the party assembled at the palazzo Della Piazza to begin their journey towards Genoa, was

that of the day on which Rodovina and her accomplice, Zincti, had been condemned to suffer.

The conte desiring that neither his wife nor Rosabella should experience any unnecessary anxiety, by being acquainted with the exact time of their death, recommended to them to begin their journey early in the morning, which he said would allow them more time for rest during the day, and favour Rosabella's weak state of health. They agreed unsuspectingly to his proposal, and set out, after an early breakfast, accompanied by the signora Bianca, Flavia, and their attendants.

The conte judging that reasons might occur to require the presence of himself or Sylvio, in the city, during the course of the day, promised to overtake them in the evening, at the village where they had agreed to repose that night.

About three hours after their departure from the city, the impatient crowd was collected round the platform of death, on which the culprits were to ex-

piate the crimes of their past lives by the forfeiture of their existence. The buzz of expectation sounded on every side. The hypocrite was drawing a comparison between his own heart and that of the criminals; the mind of benevolence expressed its hope of their punishment ending with their existence; the unfeeling rejoiced only that the case was not their own; and a tribe, still more senseless than these, were expressing their impatience for the sight.

At length the door, which opened from the prison upon the scaffold, was thrown back upon its hinges. The moment this was witnessed by the crowd, the single words of "Now! now! There! there!" burst from every mouth; and the awful silence of dread, and expectation mixed, then prevailed.

First was led forth to the public gaze, Michael Vivane, a part of whose sentence it had been to witness the sufferings of his less fortunate accomplices. Next appeared Iago Zincti, with his neck bared for the rope, a deadly pale-

ness overspreading his features, which were rendered so inanimate by apprehension, that he already appeared a corpse.

Lastly came forth Rodovina Maritos. From the moment at which the conte Della Piacca and Sylvio had left her dungeon, two days before, the frenzy of her soul had been increasing with every instant. The more strongly the priest who attended her had represented to her the offences she had been guilty of to her Creator, by the conduct of her past life, the more she had dreaded to pray for mercy to him whom she had offended. "I am lost! eternally condemned and lost!" was the only sentence which had proceeded from her lips. Great as had been the exertions of her agitated mind, still her strength had not deserted her; and, at the foregoing midnight, whilst the priest and her daughter had believed her occupied in silent prayer, with a sudden start she had dashed her head against the stone wall of her prison, with the intention of ending her existence.

The blow had not been so effective as she had desired it should; but it had been sufficient to deprive her of all sense, and to throw her back inanimate upon the floor of the prison. Vitellia had called for assistance, and means had been used for recalling her into life. The flowing of the blood had been stanchd by bandages; and some drink, of a restorative nature, had been poured down her throat.

As sense returned, the frenzy of her mind had entirely evaporated; she was now become calm, and obedient to the instructions of the priest. Thus she continued till the moment arrived at which she was called to her fate. When she heard the summons, a silent struggle, between fortitude and weakness, appeared to pass in her breast; her resolution conquered, and she sprang up from the bench on which she was reclining.—“My child!” she said, throwing her arms round the neck of Vitellia, “take thou warning by the fate of thy wretch-

ed mother! it is not yet too late for thee to repent. I charge thee, sin no more; it is the only blessing I am capable of tasting at this miserable moment." She impressed on her lips a fervent kiss, and repeating, in a most emphatic tone, "I charge thee, sin no more!" she suffered herself to be led to the platform.

The instant she arrived upon it, probably conceiving that the pain with which her head was bursting was occasioned by the bandages which encircled it, she tore them off, and threw them from her. The blood began again immediately to flow from the wound, and the ghastly horror of her countenance was increased by the unchecked current.

While Zincti was undergoing the performance of his sentence, at the hand of the executioner, she knelt in prayer by the side of the priest. At length the executioner awaited her; raising her hands to heaven, as she fixed her eyes on the wheel, she exclaimed—"Oh God, that my death were past!" She paused an instant, and advancing a few steps,

towards the edge of the scaffold, she said —“ Mothers, save your daughters from the fate to which you see me condemned ; teach them that the greatest virtue of a woman’s life is *modesty* ; my deviation from it was the first step which has brought me to this wretched end ; teach them to be *modest*, and you will save them from *criminality*.”

This said, she suffered the executioner to place her upon the wheel. The priest knelt in prayer by her side. Once more she directed her eyes towards the populace—“ Pray for me !” burst from her lips, and in a few instants she emitted her last breath, in the midst of unsatisfactory repentance and bodily tortures.

Intelligence that the dreadful ceremony of the hour had taken place having been conveyed to the conte Lorenzo, he dispatched a message to Michael Vivane, assuring him that he had placed his mother in a situation of comfort, where every attention should be paid to her till the term of his imprisonment was expired ; at which time he would lend

his assistance to him, in procuring him some creditable employment for the remainder of his days.

Vitellia was the next object of his care.—He had gained permission for her to become an inhabitant of a mansion, supported by the contributions of the benevolent, for the reform of the profligate; and to this he had her immediately conveyed.

These matters having been attended to, no further cause existed to detain the conte Della Piacca at Turin; and therefore, with his friend Sylvio, he immediately left it.

On overtaking their travelling companions, they found that Rosabella had borne her day's journey with very little fatigue, and was in excellent spirits; which no one doubted to be produced by the pleasure she anticipated at again beholding Felix. But there was a new sensation attached to this pleasure, which might either heighten or depress the expected joy. She was *again* to behold Felix, but Felix was to behold her for

the *first time*; and it might be possible that the charm of friendship, in which she had held his senses, might fade under his newly-acquired power of beholding her person.

In the presence of the conte and Sylvio, she forbore to introduce the subject which filled her heart; but when alone with Averilla and Bianca, she spoke freely of all her apprehensions and all her wishes.

There is nothing which affords so great delight to the love-devoted heart, as to unburthen its feelings in the bosom of sympathizing friends. It is an indulgence which not only robs doubt or absence of half their power to wound, but which carries with it a double sensation of delight, by imperceptibly fixing the ideas more strongly on the object of adoration.

Towards evening, on the third day of their journey, they arrived at the precincts of the village Del Alvaretti. Rosabella had already expressed her earnest desire to be permitted to proceed with

her brother and the signora Bianca to the villa di Rosalva; as she wished the particulars of her history to be communicated to the family Del Alvaretti by the friendly tongue of Averilla, before she was introduced to them in her real character. Here they, accordingly, parted, with a promise of meeting again on the following day.

Felix had now enjoyed the blessing of his sight for nearly six days; and was, therefore, become, in some measure, able to calculate distances, and to distinguish between substance and shade; but he was not yet deemed sufficiently acquainted with the use of sight, by the kind Morano, who still continued with him, to be allowed to move about unled.

When Averilla entered the palazzo Del Alvaretti, Felicia met her, with Felix leaning on her arm. For a minute they were all silent; during which the features of all were animated with the warmest expression, except those of him by whom their emotions were caused.—“Felix, it is Averilla whom you

behold," at length burst from the lips of the contessa. The sound of her voice was an instant conviction to his senses.—
 "Dearest Averilla!" he exclaimed, and clasped her in his arms. The tears fell from the eyes of both. After having, a second time, pressed her to his heart, he released her from his grasp, and said—
 "Oh, Averilla, I never murmured at the imperfect state in which it pleased Providence to send me into life; and it has rewarded my patient endurance, with feelings of that exquisite nature which it is impossible for those to conceive, who have not wandered in the darkness I have done!"

CHAP. XVI.

HAVING thus far deduced our history according to the plan announced in the preface, of awarding to vice its due punishment, and bestowing on virtue its merited recompence, our readers will,

doubtless, guess that we shall not transgress our rule with the long-suffering Rosabella, and the exemplary Felix ; and that, were it from no other cause than that of conformity to our system, we should render them the greatest degree of happiness in the possession of each other.

If thus they have divined, they are true prophets. No sooner did Felix become acquainted with the sex of that friend whom he had before called Sylvio, with the real cause of the error into which himself and his family had all fallen with regard to his supposed affection for Averilla, and, above all, with the interest Rosabella had taken in his happiness, in becoming the instrument of bringing him acquainted with that benevolent man to whom he owed the blessing of his sight, than his friendship was converted into the most perfect love; and as we have already been admitted to the cabinet secrets of Rosabella, it is almost unnecessary to say that she did not frown on his hopes.

The signor Rossano, and his daughter, the marchesa Hyppolita di Bivelli, alone, did not smile on the proposed alliance so cheerfully, as every one else allied to the parties whom it concerned. But Rossano had pledged his word to Morano, not to restrict the inclination of his son in marriage, as the condition of his gifting him with sight; the word of a merchant is sacred, and therefore it was impossible for him to endeavour to retract his promise; and his dislike was also considerably softened by a dower of ten thousand zechins, which the conte Della Piacca insisted on presenting her with on the day of her marriage. — “My name,” he said, “has been instrumental in adding to the unpleasantness of your past life; it is therefore but just that it should, like all your other enemies, make you some remuneration for its offences.”

Peace now smiled on the house of Di Rosalva; the lowering clouds which had for some time past obscured its happiness were dispersed, and the union of

Felix with Rosabella was the golden sun that cast a joyful splendour over the scene.

At the wedding festivities of Rosabella, Virgilia della Bagua again beheld the beautiful peasant, who had fascinated her heart on the mountains of Tortona; and as the knowledge that we are beloved, frequently leads us to contemplate with affection an object who would, perhaps, never else inspire us with passion, Sylvio became first flattered by Virgilia's opinion of him; and thence, passed through the intermediate steps of her friend and lover, into her husband.

Having proved the excellence of the hearts of Felix and his Rosabella, it is unnecessary to say, that the gratitude which they so eminently felt for the chief instrument of their happiness, the worthy Morano, they returned to him in the most grateful coin in which it is possible to reward a mind of feeling—that of their friendship and their love.

That Averilla and her husband enjoy-

ed that felicity in the marriage state which can alone be the result of the exemplary virtues they practised—of the pure affection which reciprocally warmed their breasts, and of the unlimited confidence which they placed in the hearts of each other, we have already fully shewn; and we shall conclude with hoping that all married couples into whose hands our *secret* chances to fall, may so benefit by this part of our moral, as to render it *a secret worth its weight in gold.*

THE END.



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